

Crisps

If food police existed, crisps would be seen as one of the major offenders in the diet. Currently 10 billion crisp bags are sold per year, meaning each person consumes an average of 100 packs per year.

Today, crisps are one of the world's favourite snacks, eaten by people of all ages and classes.

Apparently potato crisps were born when a particularly fastidious dinner guest complained that his chips were not thin enough and kept on sending them back to the kitchen. The rather fed-up chef was out to teach his demanding customer a lesson. He delicately cut potatoes into wafer-thin slices and then tossed them in sizzling oil until crisp and golden. In the UK crisp manufacture began in the post-war rationing period, when restrictions on the availability of meat and flour meant hard times for butchers and bakers. Potatoes were sold as thin fried slices.

With soaring numbers of overweight and obese children and adults, crisps may be one of the main culprits. The main criticism of crisps is; they are calorie dense, high fat and high salt snacks. Apart from calories, fat and salt, crisps contain no other nutritional value, making them empty calorie snacks.

Crisps are mainly made of potatoes or corn (maize) and recently the use of vegetables like celeriac, beetroot or parsnips have become popular. The thin slices are then fried in oil. The oils used vary, but the most popular blend would be of vegetable oil and sunflower oil.

From a health point of view all crisp packets are much of a muchness. Even a product claiming reduced fat, could still contain 12 g of fat per portion, which is a lot of fat compared to another savoury snack, e.g. olives in brine (30 g), containing only 3.6 g of fat per portion. The average packet of crisps contains at least 0.5 g of salt. Bear in mind that our salt allowance for the day is only 6g and for children it's even less.

Believe it or not, crisps, as many other calorie dense and high salt snacks, could be part of a healthy diet if eaten less frequently. If you eat a packet of crisps every day, every week for a year you have consumed, 66,065 calories and 4,161 g of fat. But, if you ate a packet a week you have saved 56,291 calories and 3,545.2 g of fat. This has got to be worth a change to the typical British lunchbox.