



The Souper Bowl

COMPETITION FOR SOUP SALES HEATS UP

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

The soup aisle is hot.

For years, not much was new. Some lines made claims like low-fat or organic, some came in cups instead of cans, and flavours started to move beyond chicken noodle and tomato. But overall, soup shelves still offered comfort food circa 1950.

Today, companies are tripping over each other to cut sodium, trim calories, boost vegetables, add whole grains, and go “natural.” Did they realize that many of their soups supplied more than half a day’s sodium? Are old standbys like Campbell’s and Primo feeling the heat from Imagine, Pacific, Amy’s, and other smaller brands?

Whatever got the large soup makers off their corporate backsides (and back to their test kitchens), it’s about time. Here’s how to steer your way through the new soup aisle.

Information compiled by Jennifer Libman in Toronto, with help from Namita Davis in Toronto and Lauren Clark in Ottawa.

SLASHING SODIUM

On average, a 250 mL cup of Campbell’s condensed soup has about 700 milligrams of sodium. That’s close to half a day’s worth...assuming you eat only one of the 2⅓ servings that the label says the can makes. Eat half a can and you get 800 mg.

These days, many soup makers have at least one “less salt” or “lower sodium” line. Most—like President’s Choice Blue Menu and Campbell’s Healthy Request, Créations, V8, and Condensed kids soups—slash the sodium to 480 mg per serving. How?

Healthy Request and V8 replace some ordinary salt with sea salt that has less sodium, according to Campbell. And they and some others swap a portion of their sodium chloride for potassium chloride, which lowers the sodium *and* helps lower blood pressure. Other soups (like Happy

Planet) don’t need as much sodium because they’re refrigerated, not canned or dried.

Just keep in mind that you have other choices. Amy’s Lower in Sodium, Happy Planet, Imagine, and Pacific Reduced Sodium soups drop to the 300s to 400s. Better yet, President’s Choice Low in Sodium Blue Menu soups hit 140 mg. And Soup’s On refrigerated soups (available in Ontario) clock in at just 100 to 150 mg.

With so many lower-salt soups on the market, why does the Heart & Stroke Foundation allow ones with as much as 650 mg of sodium per serving to sport a Health Check symbol? The foundation says that it plans to lower the cut-off to 480 mg later this year.

Campbell has already cut the sodium in many of its lines low enough to qualify. (That’s *per serving*. Eat the

entire bowl or can and you could be over the limit.) Let’s hope other soup makers follow—or, better yet, outdo—the leader.

How do lower-sodium soups taste? Overall, they beat the older Health Valley No Salt Added soups hands down. But reactions varied depending on the soup and the taster. In general, chicken noodle, lentil, and split pea are more likely to taste most like their regular counterparts.

Bottom line: let your taste buds be your guide. (See the photos below for three of our favourites.)

At least now you have options—even more if you’re a do-it-yourselfer. (Check out our soup recipes on page 12.) And even if you don’t start from scratch, you can jazz up some of the blander soups without much fuss.

Try adding rinsed and drained canned white beans, fresh basil leaves, black pepper, and grated Parmesan to a tomato soup. Or simmer a lentil soup with some baby spinach and diced red bell pepper and onion. Or heat up a butternut squash soup with a dash of curry powder, a little minced fresh ginger, and a few cilantro leaves.



Chili pepper kick in a flavourful, rich, black-bean base.



Close your eyes and you’re in New Delhi.



Brimming with delicious, fresh-tasting veggies.

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SOUP FOR ONE?

According to the Nutrition Facts panel, a serving of Campbell's Healthy Request Herbed Chicken with Brown Rice has 470 milligrams of sodium. Sounds impressive.

And it would be...except that the number applies to just two-thirds of the package. Eat the entire 398 mL bowl for lunch and you end up with 750 milligrams of sodium—half a day's worth.

The calories and sodium are for just two-thirds of a bowl. So much for "healthy."

It's hard to imagine that anyone shares these soups, which come in microwavable bowls that don't need to be refrigerated and that are clearly designed for people at work or eating on the go.

Imagine Organic's three (398 mL) microwavable soups also lowball their numbers. By the time you've polished off your last spoonful, the 320 to 520 mg of sodium that the Nutrition Facts panels list for each serving will likely have morphed into 510 to 830 mg.

Take-home message: Always check a food's serving size before you look at the calories or any other numbers.



Switch from cans to cartons or cups to dodge the BPA.

CAN CANS?

Are canned soup's days numbered?

Nearly all can liners (and some plastic bottles) contain a chemical called Bisphenol A (BPA), a building block of plastic that's in the epoxy resin used to line cans.

In some animal studies, BPA seemed to alter maternal, sexual, and other behaviours that are influenced by hormones. And some—though not all—animal studies suggest that BPA may increase the risk of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. (See "Hard Questions About a Hard Plastic," *Nutrition Action*, April 2008, p. 8.)

In December, when *Consumer Reports* magazine analyzed 19 different foods sold in the United States, some of the highest levels of BPA turned up in the two canned soups it tested: Progresso Vegetable Classics Vegetable and Campbell's Condensed 25% Less Sodium Chicken Noodle. (The highest levels were in canned green beans.)

In this country, Health Canada's Bureau of Chemical Safety is trying to decide how much Bisphenol A is safe in foods. Until the government acts—or until companies voluntarily change the kind of cans they use—you can avoid or reduce your exposure to BPA by buying soup in cartons or cups. Or make your own (see p. 12 for recipes).

SOUPED UP VEGETABLES

"A FULL Serving of Vegetables," crow Campbell's Condensed Tomato and Gardennay Field Potato with Spring Leek soups.

Companies are competing to be rich in vegetables? That's a good thing...sometimes.

When Campbell's Gardennay Field Potato says vegetables, for example, it means white potatoes, which are more like white flour than a nutrient-packed vegetable.

And a full serving of vegetables means mostly tomato paste in Campbell's Condensed Tomato. There's nothing wrong with tomatoes, but there's nothing special about what's essentially a bowl of watered down tomato paste.

Looking for vegetables? If you like puréed soups, check out Pacific Foods Organic Reduced Sodium, Imagine Organic boxed, or (in Ontario) Soup's On refrigerated soups. Some flavours are made largely of vegetables like squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, or broccoli. No pasta or rice and no chewy chunks of meat or chicken.

Campbell's V8 and Knorr ready-to-serve Green, Red, Orange, and Yellow soups have sprung up in the grocery store to challenge the competition. V8 keeps the sodium at 480 mg per serving. Too bad the Knorr's are all at 650 mg.



Think freshly roasted butternut squash.

GRAIN DANCE

Kudos to Campbell. Its Healthy Request and kids soups use brown rice and (mostly) whole-grain pasta.

While they don't have enough rice or pasta to supply much fibre, there's no reason why soups should use refined white grains when whole grains taste just as good...or better. (Odds are, you won't notice the difference.)

Weight Watchers Smart Ones soups boast that they "may assist in achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight because [they are] a high source of fibre" and are fat free or low fat. But some of that fibre comes from "chicory root inulin." (The rest comes from beans, brown rice, and/or vegetables.) Some Campbell's Healthy Request soups also have inulin.

Do inulin and other isolated fibres lower the risk of constipation, heart disease, diabetes, or any other health problem? No one knows. 🍌



Why stick with white rice when you can get brown?

SLURP VS. SLURP

Best Bites contain no more than 240 milligrams of sodium per serving. **Honourable Mentions** contain no more than 480 mg. Both have no more than 2 grams of saturated fat. Within each section, soups are ranked from least to most sodium, then least to most sat fat, most to least fibre, and least to most calories.

	Calories	Saturated Fat (g)	Fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)
Multi-Serve (1 cup prepared)				
✓✓ Health Valley Organic No Salt Added ¹	130	0	6	50
✓✓ Soup's On ^{1R}	90	0	3	130
✓✓ President's Choice Blue Menu Low in Sodium ¹	130	1	4	140
Antica Roma ^{1R}	340	11	4	140
✓ Amy's Organic Lower in Sodium, except Tomato Bisque ¹	130	0	7	340
Amy's Organic Lower in Sodium Tomato Bisque	130	3	3	340
✓ President's Choice Blue Menu Souprême—Carrot or Tomato and Herb ¹	90	0	3	380
✓ Happy Planet Organics ^{1R}	120	1	4	390
✓ Pacific Foods Organic Reduced Sodium ¹	110	2	2	400
✓ Primo—Country Harvest Vegetable, Lentil, Minestrone, or Roasted Vegetable ¹	110	0	4	410
✓ Primo Amore Sicilian Meatball	140	2	3	410
✓ Whole Foods 365 Organic Black Bean	150	0	6	430
✓ Imagine Organic, except Creamy Chicken or Creamy Tomato ¹	100	0	2	440
✓ Wolfgang Puck Organic—Classic Minestrone or Spicy Bean ¹	170	1	7	460
✓ Taste Adventure Sweet Corn Chowder	190	0	5	470
✓ Amy's Organic Black Bean Vegetable	140	0	5	480
✓ President's Choice Blue Menu ¹	140	0	5	480
✓ Happy Planet Naturals Armenian Red Lentil ^R	90	0	4	480
✓ Campbell's Healthy Request ¹	110	0	4	480
✓ Campbell's Condensed Fiesta Tomato	80	0	2	480
✓ Campbell's Condensed 25% Less Salt Tomato	100	0	2	480
✓ Campbell's Condensed, kids ¹	90	0	1	480
✓ Campbell's Créations, except Smoky Bacon Clam Chowder ¹	110	1	3	480
✓ Campbell's V8 ¹	120	1	3	480
Campbell's Créations Smoky Bacon Clam Chowder	170	3	2	480
President's Choice Blue Menu Souprême—Black Bean or Winter Squash ¹	120	1	4	520
Taste Adventure, except Sweet Corn Chowder ¹	220	0	12	540
Selection Condensed 30% Less Salt and 50% Less Fat ¹	50	1	0	550
Primo Amore, except Sicilian Meatball ¹	160	1	4	590
Amy's Organic, except Black Bean Vegetable ¹	110	1	4	620
Primo, except Country Harvest Vegetable, Lentil, Minestrone, or Roasted Vegetable ¹	110	1	2	620
Campbell's Condensed Low Fat ¹	70	0	1	640
Campbell's Gardennay ¹	120	1	4	650
Knorr (ready-to-serve)—Green, Orange, Red, or Yellow ¹	100	1	3	650
Campbell's Condensed 25% Less Salt Cream of Mushroom*	100	1	2	660

	Calories	Saturated Fat (g)	Fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)
Pacific Foods ¹	110	1	4	670
Weight Watchers Smart Ones ¹	60	0	4	680
Imagine Organic—Creamy Chicken or Creamy Tomato ¹	80	0	3	680
Knorr (mix) ¹	70	0	1	680
Pacific Foods Organic (box) ¹	100	1	2	690
Campbell's Ready to Enjoy ¹	130	1	3	700
Wolfgang Puck Organic, except Classic Minestrone or Spicy Bean ¹	150	4	3	700
Knorr Cream soup (mix) ^{1*}	80	0	1	720
Campbell's Condensed, except Fiesta Tomato ¹	90	0	3	730
Campbell's Chunky ¹	170	1	3	740
Knorr (box) ¹	120	2	3	740
Pacific Foods Organic (can) ¹	140	0	5	750
No Name (mix) ¹	50	0	1	750
Habitant ¹	120	1	5	780
Lipton Noodle (mix) ¹	80	0	1	800
No Name Condensed ¹	100	1	2	820
Heinz Condensed ¹	80	0	1	830
Baxters—Favourites ¹ or Luxury ¹	110	1	2	830
Campbell's Condensed Cream soup ^{1*}	130	2	2	840
President's Choice ¹	120	1	2	850
No Name Condensed Reduced Fat ¹	70	1	0	900
No Name Rich & Chunky ¹	130	1	2	980

	Calories	Saturated Fat (g)	Fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)
Single-Serve (1 container prepared)				
✓ President's Choice Blue Menu—Barley Vegetable or Spicy Thai (250 mL) ¹	170	0	5	340
✓ Nile Spice Sweet Corn Chowder (250 mL)	110	1	3	380
President's Choice Blue Menu, except Barley Vegetable or Spicy Thai (250 mL) ¹	220	0	8	580
Nile Spice, except Sweet Corn Chowder (250 mL) ¹	170	0	7	650
Lipton Cup-a-Soup (175 mL) ¹	60	0	0	690
Imagine Organic (398 mL) ¹	210	1	8	720
Campbell's Healthy Request (398 mL) ¹	200	1	5	720
Campbell's Soup at Hand (284 mL) ¹	110	1	3	740
Campbell's Hearty Noodles (280 mL) ¹	200	0	2	930
Campbell's Chunky (398 mL) ¹	220	1	6	1,030
Annie Chun's Noodle Bowl (313 mL) ¹	250	0	1	1,100
No Name Oriental Noodles and Soup Mix (cup) (430 mL) ¹	310	7	2	1,140
Mr. Noodles Noodles in a Cup (430 mL) ¹	280	6	0	1,200
Thai Kitchen Rice Noodle Bowl (375 mL) ¹	240	0	2	1,480
No Name Oriental Noodles and Soup Mix (pouch) (500 mL) ¹	380	7	3	1,650
No Name Oriental Noodles and Soup Mix (bowl) (500 mL) ¹	420	9	2	1,830
Mr. Noodles Noodles (pouch) (500 mL) ¹	380	6	0	2,000
Mr. Noodles Kimchi Bowl Noodles (500 mL) ¹	390	7	0	2,180
Mr. Noodles Bowl (625 mL) ¹	480	10	1	2,830

✓✓ Best Bite. ✓ Honourable Mention. ¹ Average. ^RRefrigerated. * Prepared using 1% milk.

Daily Limits (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Sodium:** 1,500 milligrams. **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Fibre:** at least 25 grams.

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