

GRAHAK SATHI

Beware of the High Sugar in Tomato Ketchup or Sauce



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Be mindful when consuming Tomato Ketchup or Sauce



One of the most favorite and widely consumed condiments in India is Tomato Ketchup or Tomato Sauce, whether it is in homes or in restaurants. It is an essential accompaniment to samosas and chips etc. and children eat it even with roti or bread. It is liked for its sweet and spicy taste. It is easily available, affordable and has a long shelf life. Tomato sauce or ketchup is also available in small packages including single serve pouches.

Packaged Tomato Ketchup and Tomato Sauce are similar products. Both names are used interchangeably in India. Both are prepared by blending tomatoes juice/puree/paste with sugar, salt, vinegar, spices and other ingredients. Tomato sauce for specific use, such as for pizza or pasta is normally called Pizza Sauce or Pasta Sauce and not just tomato sauce.



Is tomato ketchup/sauce nutritious: The main ingredient is tomatoes which contain lycopene. Lycopene is an antioxidant and has anticancer, anti-inflammatory and antidiabetic properties. However, packaged tomato ketchup/sauce is a highly processed food which is high in sugar and salt. Therefore, it should not be considered a good source for lycopene. It is primarily consumed for taste.

CERC tests tomato sauce and tomato ketchup brands: Considering the wide consumption of tomato sauce and ketchup, we decided to test several brands for their salt and sugar content, presence of artificial colours and total bacterial count. Higher consumption of both salt and sugar is harmful for health. Artificial colours can be toxic. The total bacterial count indicates if there is any microbiological contamination which can make the food unsafe for consumption. We tested 9 brands of tomato ketchup and 3 brands of tomato sauce.

Important things you should know

RDA for Sugar - As per the Dietary Guidelines by National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) per day for Sugar for a balanced diet for adults with sedentary to moderate activity is 20g to 30g.

RDA for Salt - As per National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) Guidelines, the Per Day Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of Salt (Sodium Chloride) is not more than 6g/day (equivalent to one teaspoon of salt or 2400mg of sodium).

What is a High Fat, Sugar, Salt (HFSS) food

According to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) Guidelines, a food product containing –

- Salt more than 1.5g/100g (600mg sodium) is considered a High Salt product
- Sugar more than 22.5g/100g is considered a High Sugar product
- Fat more than 17.5g/100g is considered a High Fat product

Always check the nutrition information on package label to know if it is a high fat, sugar or salt food. Avoid buying packs that do not have this information. Also, avoid buying packs of High Fat, Sugar, Salt (HFSS) foods as you can exceed your RDAs when you consume them.

How much salt and sugar do Tomato Sauces and Ketchups have



For the 9 different brands of tomato ketchup and 3 different brands of tomato sauce that we tested for salt and sugar content, presence of artificial colour, and total bacterial count, this is what we found:

Salt content

- Out of the total 12 brands studied, 3 brands did not mention the salt (sodium) content on the label. You should avoid buying such brands.
- Salt in all 9 brands of tomato ketchup ranged between 2.12g/100g to 4.04g/100g.
- Salt in the 3 brands of tomato sauce ranged between 1.62g/100g to 3.39g/100g.
- The salt content makes all of the brands tested High Salt Products as per FSSAI Guidelines (salt more than 1.5g/100g).
- However, the serving size on package labels is usually around 10g (1-2 spoons). The RDA of salt is not more than 6g/day.
- Hence if you are consuming a small quantity like a couple of spoons of sauce/ketchup, you can limit your salt intake from it. The key is to watch your serving size.

Sugar content

- One brand did not mention the sugar content on its label. Avoid buying such brands.
- Sugar in all 9 brands of tomato ketchup ranged between 16.37g/100g to 30.13g/100g.
- Sugar in the 3 brands of tomato sauce ranged between 19.85g/100g to 22.18g/100g.
- One brand had sugar content of 16.37g/100g which is moderately high. All other 11 brands had sugar content of more than 19g/100g, out of which 4 brands had sugar higher than 22.5g/100g, making them all High Sugar products.
- It is recommended to watch your serving size and the quantity you are eating to limit your sugar intake from ketchup/sauce. For people watching their sugar intake, sauces and ketchups are avoidable.

Artificial Colour: None of the 12 brands contained any artificial colour in their products.

Total Bacterial Count: All 12 brands of sauce/ketchup tested did not have any bacterial, yeast, or mold contamination.



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Tips for Consumers



Follow the tips given below to make sure that you buy a product which is suitable for your taste and health needs.

- You should never avoid reading the label. When choosing a tomato ketchup or sauce to buy, make sure that you look at the label for ingredients and nutritional values. Compare different brands before buying.
- Check the ingredients list. Make sure that all the ingredients are natural, not synthetic.
- If you are looking for a good ketchup, look for key ingredients - tomato paste, essential spices, vinegar and sugar. Compare brands and choose one with more tomato content and less sugar.
- Check the label for caloric value. It is recommended to select a brand with less than 100 calories in 100g of ketchup/sauce.
- Compare brands when buying and select a brand which has low sodium (salt) content. Also see that it is low in fat.
- Tomato ketchups/sauces come in many varieties – regular, no onion, no garlic, sweet and spicy etc. Some may be higher in salt or sugar than others. Choose according to your taste preference but always read the nutrition label to make sure that you are not compromising your health with a high salt or high sugar variant.
- Some brands make various health claims such as low fat, low sugar, or no added sugar etc. Always check the Nutritional Facts table to know the actual sugar content, as the claims can be very misleading specially for people with Diabetes.
- Check for storage instructions. Some products may need refrigeration after opening, while others can be stored at room temperature. Store the product according to the manufacturer's recommendations to ensure freshness.
- Always check the 'expiry date' or 'use before date' while purchasing.
- If you use tomato ketchup and tomato sauce frequently, buying in bulk/large package may save you money. Just ensure you have proper storage for larger quantities.
- Before trying a new brand or product, read reviews from other consumers to get an idea of the taste and quality.



Links to our recent issues

1. Grahak Sathi Educates and Empowers Consumers
2. Do Not be Misled by Food Labels
3. Grahak Sathi Yuva (January 2024)
4. Your Complete Guide to Cooking Oils
5. Grahak Sathi Educates and Empowers Consumers

Expert Speak

In this issue,
Dr. Prabodh Halde,
Head - Regulatory,
Marico Ltd. talks about
How to master a topic



Dr. Prabodh Halde

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