

Calories in popular UK restaurant chain dishes can be 'shockingly high' warn experts

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The calorie content of popular starters, sides and desserts served in UK restaurant chains is too high and only a minority meet public health recommendations, finds a University of Liverpool study published in

BMJ Open.

University of Liverpool researchers call for the [food industry](#) to reduce the number of calories in [food products](#) sold to the general public and for mandatory labelling of all [restaurant food](#).

England's national public health agency recently recommended that midday and evening meals contain no more than 600 calories (kcal) each. But while the poor nutritional content of '[fast food](#)' has been well studied, the [energy content](#) of traditional 'full service' restaurants, which also offer starters, sides and desserts with their main meals, has received less attention.

To better understand the extent to which restaurants are contributing to overconsumption, researchers compared the calorie content of popular starters, sides and desserts from major full service restaurant chains in the UK. This research follows up on previous research examining the calorie content of main meals published last year.

In the study researchers, led by Dr. Magdalena Muc Da Encarnacao and Dr. Eric Robinson from the University's Department of Psychological Sciences, analysed the calories in 1009 dishes (212 starters, 318 sides and 479 desserts) from 27 large UK restaurant chains (21 full-service, six fast-food).

They found an average of 488 kcal for starters, 397.5 kcal for sides and 430.6 for desserts. The percentage of dishes exceeding the recommended number of calories in a full meal (600 kcal) was 26.4% for starters, 21.7% for sides and 20.5% for desserts. Compared with fast-food chains, desserts offered at full-service restaurants were on average more calorific and were significantly more likely to exceed 600 kcal.

These findings are striking, particularly when we know that very few

restaurants provide in-store information on the nutritional quality of their products. The government are currently considering making restaurants provide calorie information by law.

Dr. Muc Da Encarnacao, said: "The average energy content of sides, starters and desserts sold in major UK restaurants is high. One in four starters and one in five sides and desserts in UK chain restaurants exceed the recommended energy intake for an entire meal."

Dr. Eric Robinson, said: "The foods we are being served across the food sector have far too many calories in them and it is not surprising there is an obesity problem in the UK. The food industry need to act more responsibly and reduce the number of dishes they're serving containing shockingly high calories. However, it's unlikely that they will do this without pressure and the government need to get serious about obesity."

More information: Magdalena Muc et al. A bit or a lot on the side? Observational study of the energy content of starters, sides and desserts in major UK restaurant chains, *BMJ Open* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-029679](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-029679)

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