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## Is your sushi lunch as fattening as a Big Mac?.. not to mention packed with salt, sugar, toxic microbeads and even parasites

- Sushi taking over from the sandwich as nation's most popular grab-and-go food
- But now investigation found some servings contain more calories than a Big Mac
- Experts have also warned that sushi may contain parasites and also bacteria

By **TANITH CAREY FOR THE DAILY MAIL**  
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Sushi is fast taking over from the humble sandwich as the nation's most popular grab-and-go food. Its oh-so-healthy reputation as low-calorie and vitamin-rich has fuelled a UK market for the Japanese delicacy worth £69 million a year.

But now its halo has slipped after an investigation found some servings contain more calories than a Big Mac — or are as carbohydrate-heavy as seven-and-a-half slices of white bread.

Experts have also warned that sushi may contain parasites, bacteria and harmful microbeads — and our love for it could wipe out several species of fish.

So is sushi as good for us as we thought — or should we give it a miss?



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## HOW SUSHI CAUGHT UP WITH SARNIES

Sushi hit British High Streets when the Yo! Sushi and Itsu chains opened around 20 years ago — just as long lunch breaks were becoming a thing of the past and the neatly-packed boxes were perfect for dining ‘aldesko’.

Over recent years, sushi has appealed to increasingly health-conscious consumers. As well as endorsements from Pippa Middleton and Michelle Obama, Sir Andy Murray has said he eats up to 50 portions a day as part of the diet which has helped make him the world’s tennis number one.

All the major supermarkets now stock sushi and many, such as Tesco, are giving it shelf space once devoted to sandwiches. A recent analysis by The Grocer magazine reported that one in five under-45s now eat sushi.

## OUR VERSIONS AREN'T AS HEALTHY

We fell for sushi because we associate it with the healthy diet and long lives enjoyed by the Japanese. But our home-grown versions are a long way from the original. UK portions are about 20 per cent bigger, for starters. Kaori Simpson, owner of Edinburgh’s Harajuku Kitchen, said: ‘In Japan they use less rice and more fish — possibly because Eastern appetites are smaller.’

We Brits also douse our sushi in far more salty soy sauce than the Japanese do.



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In one experiment, Japanese diners sprinkled 15ml and Brits poured on 45ml — three times the amount. That’s around 2.7g of salt, the amount in five-and-a-half packets of crisps.

## **. . . SO THEY ADD INCHES TO OUR WAISTLINES**

Eating sushi will give you the benefits of fish oils — which support the heart, brain and skin — but may not be so good for your waistline.

A recent Channel 4 investigation found some sushi packs in more calories than a McDonald's Big Mac.

While the burger racks up 508 calories with 15g of fat and 4g of sugar, a Health and Happiness sushi box from Iitsu adds up to 579 cals, 24g of fat and 7.3g of sugar — though the firm has pointed out the sushi box contains almost double the weight of food.

## **BEWARE WORMS AND PARASITES**

Raw fish may look mouth-watering, but it can have toxic hidden ingredients — including parasites and bacteria that cause food poisoning.

It can contain 20mm anisakis worms which, when eaten, can invade the human body — attaching to the wall of the oesophagus, stomach or intestine and causing vomiting, diarrhoea and agonising stomach pain.

While farmed freshwater salmon is safer, wild salmon caught at sea or in UK rivers could be a risk, according to the Food Standards Agency.



Sushi's oh-so-healthy reputation as low-calorie and vitamin-rich has fuelled a UK market for the Japanese delicacy worth £69 million a year.

Unless it meets strict exemption requirements, all UK fish to be eaten raw must first be frozen below -18c for 24 hours to kill these parasites — but it won't make them disappear.

However, Ian Turner of food safety specialists Acoura, who worked for Yo! Sushi for ten years, said he'd never heard of anyone being taken ill after eating a dead parasite.

Michaela Archer of Seafish, which represents the seafood industry, says care needs to be taken when making sushi at home because fish only has to be frozen first if it's meant to be eaten raw — and unless you tell your fishmonger what you're planning, you may not get fish where the parasites have been killed off.

### **. . . AND THE RICE MIGHT POISON YOU**

According to NHS advice, even cooked rice can contain spores of bacillus cereus, which can cause food poisoning. If rice is left standing at room temperature — as it often is in our on-the-go sushi snack packs — the spores can grow into bacteria, which can cause food poisoning.

Mr Turner added: 'Bacteria associated with rice may not be destroyed in the cooking process. So keeping it at room temperature for a long period is a risk.'

### **THEN THERE'S THE SUGAR — AND SALT**

Stodgy white rice makes up to around 75 per cent of most sushi rolls. As a simple carbohydrate high in sugar, it is broken down very quickly into the blood stream and can cause spikes in blood sugar.

Harvard researchers have found that each additional daily serving of white rice may increase the risk of type 2 diabetes by 10 per cent.

The rice is also mixed with sugary rice vinegar to make it clump together. Dietitian Helen Bond says: 'A cup of rice in a sushi meal is equivalent to about one tablespoon of sugar and is about 60 calories. It's been processed so you're removing some of the outer husk which has removed the fibre content, so it gets released faster into the bloodstream.'



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In one Pret a Manger 230g salmon, prawn and crab sushi set, there is 10.8g of sugar — the same as around four digestive biscuits. In a Hana Box, from sushi chain Wasabi, there are 132g of carbs — equivalent to that in seven-slices of white bread.

Dietitian Helen says: 'Protein, like fish, fills you up. But there's only a small amount of fish compared with the carbohydrate white rice in sushi. Your blood sugar will drop again quite fast afterwards, leaving you more likely to be tempted by nibbles by 4pm if you'd had it for lunch.'

According to the NHS, many of us already eat too much salt. Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day — about one teaspoon.

But Tesco's Ultimate Salmon Selection set has 3.1g — more than half the daily allowance. Too much salt raises blood pressure, the major cause of strokes and heart attacks.

## **TOXIC METALS AND LETHAL PLASTICS**

Tuna is one of the most popular fish used in sushi — but it can contain microbeads — the minuscule plastic balls used in facial scrubs, shower gels and other cosmetics, which are washed down the plughole and into the oceans.

Professor Daniel Pauly, from the University of British Columbia, warns: 'Microbeads are poison pills which soak up all the pollutants. They are consumed by little fish which are then eaten by tuna.'

Although the recent Mail campaign has led to microbeads being banned from cosmetic products, tuna live for decades, so fish caught now may have had up to 40 years of exposure.

If they are in their system, these beads attract toxic chemicals such as pesticides and other pollutants including mercury. The same is true for mackerel, another popular oily fish used in sushi.

Fish can also be high in toxic metals. According to research in the journal *Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry*, mercury concentrations in yellowfin tuna have been increasing at a rate of 3.8 per cent or more a year. It leeches into the sea from mines, coal-fired power plants and sewage.

The NHS advises pregnant women to limit how much tuna they eat because mercury could affect a baby's developing nervous system.

## **IS IT BAD FOR THE PLANET?**

An estimated 10,000 tonnes of tuna a year are consumed as sashimi — fish-only sushi — in Europe from five species: skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore and bluefin.

The surge in demand has led to serious concerns about overfishing of both tuna and mackerel.

In areas including the Atlantic and Mediterranean, bluefin tuna is harvested at triple the level considered to be sustainable.

According to the World Wildlife Fund: 'Given the precarious state of stocks and the rampant illegal fishing, it may be best to avoid bluefin tuna.'

Professor Daniel Pauly and Dr Dirk Zeller, from the University of Columbia, who published a respected study last year on the global fish catch, say bluefin and yellowfin tuna populations are at 'crisis' levels.

## **THE WASABI CON**

The green paste, made from the fiery Wasabi Japonica plant, has been hailed for health benefits including anti-inflammatory effects on muscles.

However, the dollop on the side of your sushi tray is likely to be mostly made out of cheaper horseradish.

If it contains any real wasabi, it's in minuscule amounts. The ingredients on Itsu's wasabi packs says 0.6 per cent is the actual plant.

Itsu spokesperson Natasha Zialor said: 'It's normal practice for "wasabi" to contain just a small amount of actual wasabi plant.

'This is because it rapidly loses its flavour once it's been grated and is best served within five minutes.'

Link: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4126198/Is-sushi-lunch-fattening-Big-Mac.html#ixzz4W3G6asxw>