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| **- Boxed macaroni and cheese -** |
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| Kraft’s first macaroni and cheese dinners hit the shelves in 1937. The boxes cost $0.19 each.  Carl Witchell, a food historian and journalist, explains that Kraft dinner quickly became a popular product: “Because of World War II, there were restrictions on cheese and meat. People found macaroni and cheese to be a very hearty food, and they quickly adopted it.”  **A Very Popular Product**   Every week, more than 7 million boxes of Kraft macaroni and cheese are sold worldwide. In Canada alone, we consume 228,000 boxes every day. (This does not include other similar products of different brands.) In fact, we hold the world record for consumption of boxed macaroni and cheese per person.  François-Étienne Paré is a big supporter of this culinary delicacy: “I find it reassuring. There is something that reminds me of my childhood. I feel a bit like everyone else, I feel like I’m part of society thanks to Kraft dinner.”  In addition, he finds that Kraft dinner, which is simple to prepare, allows children to learn to cook.  Patricia Masbourian, a slow-food enthusiast, prefers to make her own macaroni and cheese, often adding Parmesan cheese instead of cheddar. She finds that Kraft dinner tastes more like salt than cheese. Her children don’t like it.  **What is in *Kraft dinner*?**  We analyzed the contents of a boxed macaroni and cheese meal with nutritionist Natalie Lacombe. According to the instructions, one box makes three small portions. Each portion contains about 60 grams of pasta, which is equivalent to the nutritional value of two slices of white bread, a tablespoon of butter or margarine, a splash of milk, and about 12 grams of cheese.  Some people think that macaroni and cheese is a good source of calcium, but the amount of cheese and milk is nowhere near the amount of one serving of milk products as indicated in Canada’s Food Guide.  Surprisingly, the macaroni and cheese tested all contained between one and three teaspoons of added sugar per 100 g. For the same portion, they also contain between 493 mg and 1015 mg of sodium, which is one third of the suggested amount for a day. Eating the whole box means consuming 90% of the maximum sodium suggested for a day, along with 75% of the saturated fat.  To lower the fat content, Patricia Masbourian suggests replacing half of the cheddar cheese with a low-fat cheese such as ricotta or cottage cheese.  **Reduced-fat recipe**  The Kraft box has instructions for a reduced-fat recipe. We gave it to college students to try, along with three house brands, including organic.  The result: 14 tasters chose the Compliments macaroni and cheese, 4 chose the organic President’s Choice, 4 chose the Merit Selection, and 3 chose the Kraft macaroni prepared according to the Sensible Solution recipe.  If you, like Patricia Masbourian, prefer making the macaroni and cheese yourself with fresh products, you will get a different texture and taste. However, unless you use a low-fat cheese, chances are your version will contain more fat and as much sodium as the boxed product.  It’s also important to remember that macaroni and cheese, fresh or boxed, is not a complete meal and should be served as a side dish, as Kraft originally suggested. |