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Supermarket Sampler
by Bonnie Tandy Leblang and Carolyn Wyman

06/29/2008

WHAT'S NEW ON THE GROCERS' SHELVES

Kraft Jet-Puffed StarMallows Marshmallows. \$1.39 per 10-ounce bag.

Bonnie: There's something about the Fourth of July and fireworks that brings out the patriotism in me. Seeing these new star-shaped red- (actually pink) white- and blue-colored marshmallows, I didn't immediately begin thinking about their artificial coloring or empty calories. Instead I began humming, "Hooray for the red, white and blue ..."

Then I thought how much fun it would be to sprinkle these over the tablecloth at a Fourth of July picnic or use them to make patriotic s'mores.

Carolyn: Holiday celebrations are important to recognize significant people or occasions in our lives and to make things less boring. But they take time to pull off, and at this time in our nation's history, most people find time in short supply.

That's where these Jet-Puffed StarMallows come in. Top an ice cream sundae or cupcake with these and -- a lot quicker than anyone can recite the Declaration of Independence -- you've distinguished your Fourth of July picnic or barbecue from an ordinary summer one.

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Because of StarMallows' silver-dollar size, I don't recommend them for s'mores -- at least, not unless you're looking for the minor fireworks that'll result from having these fall off your stick and into the fire.

Frito-Lay Pinch of Salt Chips. Lay's, Ruffles, Fritos, and Tostitos. \$2.29 per 6.25-ounce to 8-ounce package.

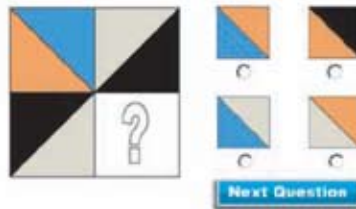
Bonnie: If you indulge a bit too often in salty chips, then let me share some exciting news. Frito-Lay now makes four of its snack chips (Lay's and Ruffles potato chips, Fritos corn chips and Tostitos tortilla chips) in versions that contain only 75 milligrams of sodium a serving. That's quite a savings, compared to up to 180 milligrams in a serving of regular Lay's.

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What's even more remarkable is that you don't miss the salt. And all four of these chips have what I'd call clean ingredient labels: nothing but the potato or corn, vegetable oil and salt.

Keep in mind, when nibbling, that the calories and fat have not changed. Still, I have to say, way to go, Frito-Lay!

Carolyn: Potato chips, pretzels and tortilla chips are commonly called salty snacks. But did you know that a slice of bread contains more salt than a 1-ounce serving of Ruffles and Fritos, and that a cup of corn flakes has more sodium than a 1-ounce serving of Lay's?

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That's the startling takeaway from the press materials touting Frito-Lay's new Pinch of Salt reduced-salt snack food line. I say "startling" because such facts make Pinch of Salt seem less like a healthy new option from a company trying to be responsible and more like a way for Frito-Lay to profit off the misperception that chips are saltier than many other commonly consumed foods.

Salt isn't the nutritional problem with chips, as one bite of the Pinch of Salt Lay's and Ruffles varieties in particular makes abundantly clear. Fat is. Take away some of the salt in these, and fat is mainly what you taste. Buy these only if that sounds good to you. But even with less salt, the Fritos and Tostitos taste pretty OK.

Kahiki EasyCrisp Egg Rolls. Vegetable, Pork & Shrimp, and Chicken. \$3.99 for 9.75-ounce package of three frozen egg rolls.

Bonnie: I was pleasantly surprised at how crisply these new egg rolls cooked in the microwave -- and without the usual cooking-sleeve flavor or aroma. Each box contains three egg rolls, individually wrapped in their cooking pouch. To prepare them, you cut off both ends of the pouch and microwave them for 2 to 3 minutes, depending on your oven wattage.

In terms of nutrition and ingredients, these are winners. No unpronounceable ingredients, no trans fats, no preservatives. Each egg roll contains from 70 to 100 calories and 2 to 5 grams of fat, with the vegetable ones on the low end of both.

Since I couldn't find much chicken or shrimp in those varieties, the vegetable is the one I'd recommend. But skip Kahiki's horrid sauce. I instead dipped mine in some sweet hot sauce called Sweet Heat Addiction from The Art of Chipotle. That or your favorite duck sauce would go well with these.

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Carolyn: Kahiki Foods EasyCrisp claims to be the first frozen egg roll designed for the microwave. Also impressive, along with the fast preparation method, is that the company can honestly market these as 100-calorie (or, in the case of the veggie and chicken, 70- and 80-calorie) snacks. And that is for a substantial 4-inch, 3-plus-ounce roll. Next to this, Nabisco's little, anemic 100-calorie packets of cookies and crackers don't stand a chance.

How was Kahiki able to accomplish this when competitive products deliver much more nutritional damage? I'm guessing it might have something to do with the roll wrapping, which, despite what Bonnie just said, is not all that crispy. (They probably need more calorie-filled grease.) But the cabbage, carrot and meat or fish stuffing all look and taste just like good takeout Chinese.

(Bonnie Tandy Leblang is a registered dietitian and professional speaker. Carolyn Wyman is a junk-food fanatic and author of "Better Than Homemade: Amazing Foods That Changed the Way We Eat" (Quirk). Each week they critique three new food items. For previous columns, visit www.supermarketsampler.com, and for more food info and chances to win free products, visit www.biteofthebest.com.)

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