Rice cakes: puffed rice cakes, Asian rice cakes, and how they compare with oatcakes and Ryvita

From the crackers.biz wiki

In Britain a rice cake usually means a puffed rice cake: a light, crisp disc of puffed grains, eaten as a snack or topped like a cracker. In East Asia, rice cake means something quite different, a soft, chewy food made from glutinous rice, such as Korean tteok or Japanese mochi. Per 100g, puffed rice cakes are similar in calories to oatcakes and crispbread, but each cake weighs very little.

Two very different foods

Rice cake is one of those names that means different things in different places. Wikipedia defines a rice cake broadly as any food made from rice that has been shaped, condensed or otherwise combined into a single object. In a British supermarket, that means a crisp, light, puffed disc that sits somewhere between a cracker and a crisp. In Korea, Japan or China, it means a soft, chewy cake of glutinous rice. This guide covers both, and shows how puffed rice cakes compare with the oatcakes and crispbread on our shelf.

Puffed rice cakes

The rice cake most British shoppers know is the puffed kind. Wikipedia describes puffed rice cakes as flat, hard discs made with puffed rice, eaten as a snack or used as a base for other ingredients, and notes that they were especially popular in the 1980s and 1990s, when dieters saw them as a lower calorie alternative to bread. They are made in seconds in a hot mould that heats slightly moist grains and then opens suddenly, so the grains puff and fuse; the science is in how rice cakes are made. Common flavours include salt and vinegar, cheese, chocolate and caramel.

What is in them?

Many British rice cakes are really rice and corn cakes. The Open Food Facts record for Snack a Jacks jumbo salt and vinegar lists wholegrain rice at 46 per cent, maize, a salt and vinegar seasoning and sunflower oil. Snack a Jacks also make sweet caramel and chocolate chip versions, which we do not stock. There are cakes made from other grains and pulses too: the record for Kallo lentil cakes lists lentil flour at 85 per cent, corn flour and buckwheat.

Asian rice cakes

In East Asia, rice cakes are a whole family of traditional foods, usually soft and chewy rather than crisp. Wikipedia describes Korean tteok as mostly made with glutinous rice flour, in steamed, pounded, boiled and pan fried varieties; Japanese mochi as glutinous rice pounded into a paste and moulded, traditionally in a ceremony called mochitsuki; and Chinese nian gao as varieties of glutinous rice pounded or ground into a paste. Korea and China also make puffed rice cakes, but a Korean recipe that asks for rice cakes, such as tteokbokki, means soft tteok, not a Snack a Jack. For Korea's biscuits, see Korean biscuits. For the crunchy rice crackers of East Asia, such as Japanese senbei and arare, see rice crackers.

How they compare with oatcakes and crispbread

Rice cakes are often compared with other light crackers. Here are the figures from the Open Food Facts records we read, per 100g:

- **Snack a Jacks salt and vinegar:** about 410 kcal, 5.7g fat and 3.8g fibre; one 10.5g cake is about 43 kcal.
- **Snack a Jacks caramel:** about 385 kcal and 18.5g of sugars; one 13g cake is about 50 kcal.
- **Kallo lentil cakes:** about 373 kcal and 6.9g fibre.
- **Ryvita Original crispbread:** about 357 kcal and 13.3g fibre; one 10.5g slice is about 38 kcal.
- **Nairn's rough oatcakes:** about 445 kcal and 10.4g fibre; one 10g oatcake is about 45 kcal.

So per 100g, rice cakes are not especially low in calories; what makes each cake light is that it is mostly air. Crispbread and oatcakes contain much more fibre than plain rice cakes. For more, see Ryvita, oatcakes and high fibre biscuits.

Diet notes

Plain rice is naturally gluten free, which is why rice cakes are popular with people avoiding gluten, but flavoured cakes can pick up gluten from seasonings or the factory: the record for Snack a Jacks caramel says it may contain milk, wheat, gluten, barley, celery and mustard. Savoury rice cakes often contain no animal products, but chocolate ones usually contain milk. Always check the pack; see gluten free biscuits and vegan biscuits.

Can you make rice cakes at home?

Not the puffed kind. Puffed rice cakes need industrial machinery: the patent examples described in our guide to how rice cakes are made use moulds heated to around 210 to 270°C and pressures of about 60 bar, and the whole cycle takes under five seconds. What you can make at home is the British party favourite, the chocolate crispy cake: puffed rice cereal stirred into melted chocolate, or butter, syrup and chocolate, spooned into paper cases and left to set. It is a rice cake of a very different kind.

Keeping them crisp

Rice cakes are very dry, so once the pack is open they soak up moisture from the air and turn chewy. Fold the bag tightly or tip them into an airtight tin, and eat them within a few days of opening; see why biscuits go soft.

How to eat rice cakes

A plain rice cake is a blank canvas. Top it like a cracker, with peanut butter and banana, cottage cheese, hummus, avocado or smoked salmon, or eat the flavoured ones straight from the bag like crisps. Because they are so light, rice cakes break easily, so spread gently.

Quick facts

Puffed rice cakes	Discs of puffed grains, made in a hot mould in seconds
Asian rice cakes	Soft, chewy foods of glutinous rice, such as tteok and mochi
Snack a Jacks	Rice and corn cakes, about 410 kcal per 100g for salt and vinegar
Ryvita Original	About 357 kcal per 100g
Nairn's rough oatcakes	About 445 kcal per 100g
Kallo lentil cakes	Lentil flour at 85 per cent, about 373 kcal per 100g

Questions people ask

What are rice cakes?

In Britain, usually puffed rice cakes: flat, crisp discs made by puffing rice, often with corn, in a hot mould. In East Asia the name means soft cakes of glutinous rice, such as Korean tteok and Japanese mochi.

Are rice cakes gluten free?

Plain rice is naturally gluten free, but always check the pack. The record for Snack a Jacks caramel rice and corn cakes, for example, says they may contain wheat, gluten and barley.

Are rice cakes vegan?

Plain and savoury ones often are: the Snack a Jacks salt and vinegar record lists no animal ingredients. Chocolate ones usually contain milk, like the Snack a Jacks chocolate chip record.

Rice cakes or oatcakes, which has fewer calories?

Per 100g they are close: about 410 kcal for Snack a Jacks salt and vinegar and 445 kcal for Nairn's rough oatcakes, in the records we read. Per piece, a 10.5g jumbo rice cake has about 43 kcal and a 10g oatcake about 45 kcal.

Rice cakes or Ryvita?

Ryvita Original has about 357 kcal per 100g and about 13.3g of fibre, against about 410 kcal and 3.8g of fibre for Snack a Jacks salt and vinegar, in the records we read.

What are rice cakes called in Korea and Japan?

The Korean word for rice cake is tteok, and the Japanese is mochi, but both are soft, chewy foods made from glutinous rice, not crisp puffed cakes.

Sources

1. Rice cake, Wikipedia
2. Puffed rice cakes, Wikipedia
3. Snack a Jacks salt and vinegar (5000328024240), Open Food Facts
4. Snack a Jacks caramel (5000328028392), Open Food Facts
5. Kallo lentil cakes (5013665114017), Open Food Facts
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