

'Skimpflation': how supermarkets reduce the quality of what you buy

As well as raising prices and cutting pack sizes, chains are quietly downgrading ingredients



📷 Bertolli, like several other brands, has reduced the olive oil content in its olive oil spreads from 21% to 10%. Photograph: AJ D Foto Ltd/Alamy



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Have you recently had the impression that the tissues you normally buy are smaller than they were? Or that the guacamole you usually throw in your trolley isn't quite as tasty as it used to be? Or that your favourite tomato pesto is a bit less tomatoey? You are probably spot-on.

Shoppers, who have already had to contend with [rising prices](#) and [shrinking pack sizes](#), now also have to look out for "skimpflation" - the quiet downgrading in specification of some products.

As the cost of ingredients soars, supermarkets and manufacturers have been quietly changing recipes and reducing the size of some products to keep shelf prices down.

Where the big brands go, the supermarkets tend to follow, and some retailers have more than halved the amount of olive oil in spreads and cut how much they use in sauces without highlighting a change in recipe. Meanwhile, the rising cost of paper has led others to reduce the size of individual tissues and kitchen roll sheets.

In some cases there is nothing on the packet to indicate that anything has changed, so consumers are not aware they are getting less for their money until they get home.

Guardian Money began looking at products after being approached by a reader who had noticed that the [Aldi](#) spread he had bought contained only 10% olive oil when previously it was 21%.

Other examples found by the Guardian include:

Morrisons Guacamole The ingredients used to include 80% avocado and 5% red onion but now show 77% avocado and an unspecified amount of onion.

Aldi Specially Selected Pesto Rosso 190g This used to contain 33% extra virgin olive oil and 26% rehydrated sun-dried tomatoes; now it is 27% extra virgin olive oil and 23% rehydrated sun-dried tomatoes.

Tesco Soft Extra Large Tissues These had been 300mm x 260mm but measured 280mm x 235mm in Guardian Money's test.

Tesco Springforce Jumbo Kitchen Towel Sheets used to be 210mm x 210mm but are now 195mm x 200mm, according to our test.

Aldi Bramwells Real Mayonnaise It used to list 9% egg yolk but now lists 6% egg and 1.5% egg yolk.

Bertolli, Morrisons and Sainsbury's olive oil spreads In these spreads, too, 21% olive oil has been reduced to 10%.

Some of the changes are small but they all involve the reduction of key, and expensive, ingredients, and some came alongside price rises or cuts to pack sizes. Morrisons, for example, cut the olive oil content in its spread and reduced packs from 500g to 450g.

In some of these cases, retailers have stopped publishing details that made it possible to compare products before buying. On Tesco's website, for example, information about the size of individual tissues has been removed.



📌 Tesco reduced the sheet size of its Springforce Jumbo Kitchen Towel.

Customers have picked up on some of the changes - but only after buying the product. On the Sainsbury's website, one customer reviewing its own-brand olive oil spread wrote: "This used to have 21% olive oil in it which, with its cheaper price than the popular brand, made it a good alternative. Now the recipe only has 10%. Profit first."

On [Tesco's website](#), [one shopper complains](#): "These tissues have changed. They are now nothing like the description. They are not luxury, soft, gentle and definitely NOT extra-large. Very inferior."

The crisis in Ukraine and drought across Europe have pushed up the price of all kinds of cooking oil, leading to adjustments in recipes that use it. This week's inflation figures showed the price of olive oil to consumers is up by 44.8% year on year. Paper pulp prices had been rising; however, recently, falling demand has pushed them lower again.

