

Pizza Huts Don't "Got Mozzarella" Atop Pizzas

Pizza Hut—the nation's largest pizza chain—deceives customers with false menu claims that "Mozzarella" cheese is on top of certain pizzas.

by Paris Reidhead

Visiting a Pizza Hut provides the patron with a little more class than the average "semi-fast" food restaurant. But any high-class aura evaporates quickly, when investigating Pizza Hut's claims that "Mozzarella" cheese is used atop certain pizzas.

- Pizza Hut uses "Pizza Cheese," not Mozzarella. "Pizza Cheese" is an inferior, non-standard cheese product. Pizza Hut's "Pizza Cheese" contains Mozzarella as an ingredient. But a spokesperson for Leprino Foods—the near exclusive supplier of Pizza Hut's "Pizza Cheese" admits that "Pizza Cheese" isn't Mozzarella.

- The sodium content of Pizza Hut's pizza slices is shockingly high—exacerbated by large quantities of salt in "Pizza Cheese."

A good reporter thoroughly researches the subject. So I took my wife out to Sunday dinner at the Pizza Hut in Cooperstown, NY. We shared an assortment of different toppings; each tasted good. Although advertised as "Mozzarella", the cheese's consistency was different from that of a nearby "Mom and Pop" pizzeria. At the non-chain eatery the cheese typically stretches out nice and stringy, even as you bite off part of a slice.

Pizza Hut's corporate office is located in Dallas. There are a total of 6,324 Pizza Hut restaurants.

Leprino Foods: Near exclusive supplier

Almost all Pizza Hut "Pizza Cheese" is supplied by Leprino Foods. Leprino is headquartered in Denver, Colorado.

"Pizza Cheese" is a non-standard variety, Italian-style amalgam. "Pizza Cheese" is supposed to look and taste like Mozzarella cheese, but "Pizza Cheese" is not a standard variety recognized under rules of the federal Food and Drug Administration.

"Pizza Cheese" is an inferior second cousin of Mozzarella. "Pizza Cheese" may contain a variety of items that would not be legal in standardized Mozzarella. Such ingredients included in "Pizza Cheese" processed and sold by Leprino Foods would include:

- *Excess moisture (water)
- *Excess salt
- *Alternate dairy proteins (such as casein and milk protein concentrate)
- *Fillers like vegetable starch.

(Editor's note: Ingredients like salt, dried dairy proteins, and starches conveniently serve to bind up more moisture. Adding water to processed food products is an age-old trick used by manufactures to boost their profits.)

Leprino Foods "Pizza Cheese" sold to Pizza Hut contains so much water that the product can only be kept in thawed conditions for one week, before it must be thrown out.

On May 11, 1999, Leprino received patent #5,902,625 from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. The patent's subheading stated, "Process of Making a soft or semi-soft fibrous cheese." The list of ingredients in this document was identical to the ingredient list printed in another "document," an empty "Pizza Cheese" box that mysteriously disappeared from a dumpster behind a Wisconsin Pizza Hut restaurant.

That discarded "Pizza Cheese" box listed the following ingredients: Mozzarella Cheese [pasteurized milk, cheese culture, salt, enzymes, modified

Pizza Hut: "Mozzarella" Topping a False Claim

Read the Box:



Side panel of a Pizza Hut "Pizza Cheese" box. A Pizza Hut spokeswoman said "Pizza Cheese" is Mozzarella. "Pizza Cheese" is NOT Mozzarella. This box was manufactured by Leprino Foods at Leprino's Allendale, Michigan plant. A Leprino spokeswoman acknowledges that "Pizza Cheese" is not Mozzarella.

Read the Pizza Hut Menu Closely:

CHEESE LOVER'S PLUS* SM \$7.99 MED \$12.19 LG \$15.49
Our cheesiest pizza! Loaded with 50% more Mozzarella cheese, plus any two toppings.

Pizza Hut's menu states "Mozzarella cheese" is contained on some pizzas items. This menu item, Cheese Lover's Plus, clearly states that Mozzarella cheese is used. A Pizza Hut spokeswoman said "Pizza Cheese" is Mozzarella. "Pizza Cheese," is a patented product different than standard Mozzarella. "Pizza Cheese" contains additional water, salt, starch, and fillers that are not legal in Mozzarella.

food starch, non-fat milk, sodium propionate (as a preservative)].

A summary of this product's personality jumps off the 15-lb. box in which the frozen shredded mass was shipped to Pizza Hut from Leprino. The box must be thawed for three days in a refrigerator, and then must be used during the next seven days. If unused by day 11, contents are to be destroyed, because they will begin to spoil! Honest to goodness Mozzarella can survive in a refrigerated state more than one week.

Some of the high spots in the wordy, 27-page Leprino Foods Patent #5,902,625 Leprino reveal the pedigree of this "Pizza Cheese." Leprino maximizes the amount of water added by up to 10%. According to Federal Food and Drug Administration specifications, Leprino's cheese has too much water to meet the legal definition of Mozzarella.

Leprino boosts water content by adding lots of salt and food starch. Patent # 5,902,625 also allows for the addition of salt in the range of 0.1-5.0%. This is despite the fact that renown cheese expert Frank Kozikowski, in his 1982 classic *Cheese and Fermented Milk Foods*, recommends that salt in Mozza-

recipe to tie up the surplus moisture. Leprino's patent permits food starch to come from any of the following plant species: potato, pea, tapioca, corn, wheat, and rice.

The acceptable patented range for food starch included in this "Pizza Cheese" is 0.5-10.0%! Pizza Hut ignores the fact that at the Federal level, 21 CFR 133.155 does not list modified food starch as an approved ingredient for Mozzarella! Nor does CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) define "Pizza Cheese" at all.

But it keeps getting better. The patent allows a range of 0.1-10.0% for dairy solids as part of "Pizza Cheese." These include casein and milk protein concentrates (MPCs). No casein or MPCs are legal in Mozzarella.

Non-dairy protein isolates were also approved to be included in a range of 0.1-10.0%. Such may include soy protein, gelatin, wheat germ, corn germ, and egg solids.

Mozzarella? Pizza Hut says "Yes," Leprino: "No"

When I asked my contact if the "Pizza Cheese" was in fact Mozzarella, she said it was. And then I asked, "It has modified food starch in it?". She said yes.

By phone I talked to Laura Majors, a marketing representative at Leprino Foods' corporate office in Denver.

I asked if "Pizza Cheese" was Mozzarella. She said it was mostly Mozzarella, and there were other ingredients added to it.

In conclusion, we must agree with the Leprino spokeswoman: Pizza Hut's "Pizza Cheese" is NOT Mozzarella.

Comparison of Sodium Levels in Pizza Hut Products and Mozzarella Cheese

Product	Serving Size (gram)	Na Yield	%Daily Value	mg Na/100 gm
Pizza Hut (PH) Pan Pizza, Cheese only	104*	500 mg	21%	481
PH 12" Pepperoni Lover's Pizza	118	700 mg	29%	593
PH 12" Cheese Lover's (double) cheese	115	580 mg	24%	504
PH 12" Cheese, extra sauce	108*	520 mg	22%	481
PH "extra sauce", amount	4**	20 mg	1%	500
Extra PH cheese to make it "double"	11	80 mg	3%	727
Normal PH cheese portion	22	160 mg	7%	727
Total cheese in PH "Double Cheese" pizza	33	240 mg	10%	727
Price Chopper Mozzarella Cheese	30	180 mg	8%	600

rella be only 0.7%!

Food starch binds lots of moisture — up to ten times its own weight! Think about how one can add food starch, in one's own kitchen, to an overly soggy

Pizza Hut: NOT Mozzarella

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Sodium content a big health concern

I took home a copy of the Pizza Hut “Keep it Balanced” nutritional information leaflet. Being personally very aware of the implications of excess dietary sodium, as I take medication for high blood pressure, I wanted to pin down the sodium data on the following pies: 12” Pizza Cheese Only Pizza, 12” Pepperoni Lover’s Pizza, and 12” Cheese Lover’s Pizza.

The nutritional data from the first two products was in this leaflet. The data for the third pizza I was able to secure from Pizza Hut’s corporate public relations office, where spokesperson Alfreeda Bolden graciously answered my questions.

From Ms. Bolden I learned that Cheese Lover’s Pizza is also called “Double Cheese Pizza,” and that it has 50% more so-called “Mozzarella” cheese than the Pizza Cheese only product. I also learned from her that the Pizza Hut crust contained no salt at all.

She listed for me the “Pizza Cheese” ingredients. These lined up perfectly with what appeared on the cardboard dumpster escapee. She told me that Pizza Hut sauce consisted of tomato paste, water, salt, garlic powder, citric acid, and spices. She said that the spices were proprietary information.

Shown below are the figures set up in chart form, consisting of actual numbers drawn directly from Pizza Hut’s data, specs on a locally marketed Mozzarella cheese, plus my own extrapolations from such data.

In the footnotes, **shows how I arrived at the amount of “extra sauce” — it is the difference between the two * items. With the given that “double cheese” actually means 50% more Mozzarella (that

from a Pizza Hut menu), I took the liberty to assume that the extra sauce amount was half the normal sauce, which would then be 8 grams, containing (by simple calculation) 40 mg sodium (Na). So one, average 104-gram slice of Pizza Hut “Cheese Only Pizza” would consist of approximately 22 grams of “Pizza Cheese,” 8 grams of sauce, and 74 grams of crust.

I made this assumption about the “normal” amount of sauce, because no one at Pizza Hut customer relations, during my second phone call, would define that term for me. Nor would anyone answer my question regarding the salt level in their “Pizza Cheese.”

On that hypothetical slice, the “Pizza Cheese” and sauce yield 160 mg and 40 mg of Na, respectively; the crust contains no salt, and no other listed Na sources. This yields a total of 200 mg sodium, compared to a sodium value of 500 mg stated in the Pizza Hut nutritional data. It appears that the salty whole is more than the sum of its parts.

So I’d like to know where the extra 300 mg. of sodium comes from. One must also ask the question, due to the questionable make-up of “Pizza Cheese”: just how much Mozzarella is 50% more?

I then asked Leprino spokeswoman, Ms. Majors if, with the possibility that “Pizza Cheese” is being supplied to Pizza Hut, could she tell me the salt level in this Leprino product. She asked me to try to get this information from Pizza Hut. I said I had already tried, unsuccessfully. She then told me and said that she could not give me the “Pizza Cheese” salt levels because such was proprietary information.

Medical Experts Very Concerned

What makes this plot thicken, along with the Pizza Hut customer’s circulatory system, is hard-core health data from groups like the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and the American Heart

Association (AHA).

The exact mechanism whereby excess sodium elevates human blood pressure is not perfectly understood, even by medical experts. But these think tanks firmly agree that lowering excess sodium reduces hypertension (high blood pressure) and the risk of cardiovascular health threats.

In fact, according to the *Cheese Reporter*, on November 11, 2005 the CSPI declared war on salt by petitioning the FDA to lower the adult sodium daily value from 2400 mg to 1500 mg. The 2400 mg figure is the basis for the daily value percentages stated in the accompanying chart. Salt (sodium chloride, or NaCl) is about 40% sodium, and there are other forms of sodium in prepared foods.

Facts provided by the AHA show the average American consumes over 4000 mg of sodium per day, helping assure the role of heart disease as the nation’s No. 1 killer. The hope of medical authorities is that if the official sodium daily value is lowered from 2400 mg to 1500mg, the average American’s daily sodium intake might end up at 2000 mg. With current Na daily values (DV) at 2400 mg., five slices of a “Cheese Only” pizza will max out this quota.

Meanwhile, I propose that Pizza Hut make pizza with the existing crust, existing sauce, and pure Mozzarella. If they were to do this, my calculations show that a 12” slice of the new “Cheese Only” pizza would consist of 22 grams of Mozzarella, 8 grams of sauce, 74 grams of crust. It would contain the 172 mg of Na from salt that it’s supposed to. It would cost Pizza Hut more to make it, but anyone yearning for a healthier, tastier, product would pay the difference, including me.

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