



OFF MENU

Instant ramen made healthy

BY JAMES RAIA

Among the staples of college life, none likely exceed the convenience and represent certain rites of passage better than pizza, beer and ramen. The go-to wonders' degrees of importance are subjective, but none qualify on the healthy diet spectrum.

It wasn't long ago that twin brothers Tim and Tom Zhang, now 28, knew campus life and its eating pitfalls. They're both UC Davis graduates but haven't settled into post-collegiate culinary habits. Instead, an idea sprouted from their collective expertise—Vite Ramen. Tim attended culinary school, cooked in a Michelin star restaurant and earned a managerial economics degree. Tom has a degree in clinical nutrition.

As much as healthy ramen may seem like an oxymoron, Vite Kitchens, the brothers' company in Vacaville, has been an unqualified success. Vite Ramen is an online-only packaged food with ingredients that give credence to a still-rare phenomenon: Fast food has gone nutritious.

"We have had a lot of reaction, some that surprised us," said Tim Zhang, who lives in Davis. "People are telling us that Vite Ramen is a complete meal, but we've also had comments from customers who are diabetics and comment they don't have insulin spikes. Others say they don't have post-meal fatigue."

The idea began with experiments in the Zhangs' house in Davis in 2017. A Kickstarter campaign in August 2018 resulted in about 4,300 backers pledging nearly \$250,000. The fund-raising goal was \$10,000.

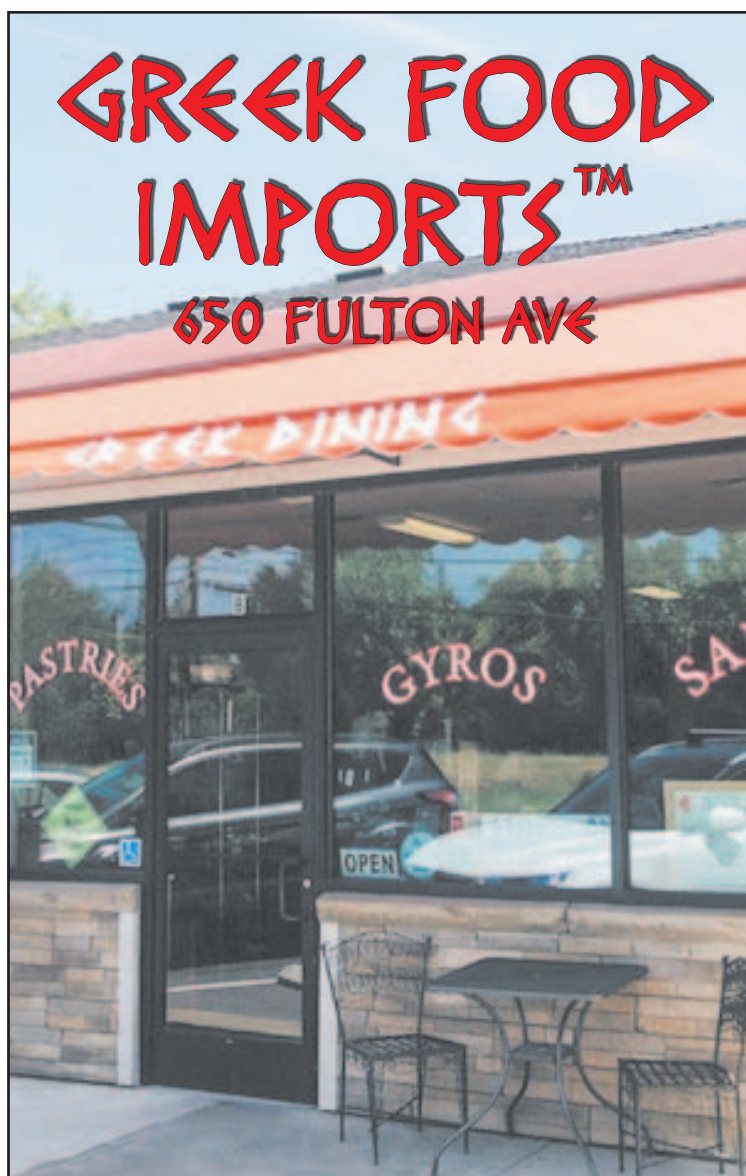
Vite Ramen's flavors are made with dehydrated broth, vegetables, spices and aromatics. The noodles are a blend of wheat flour, wheat gluten and quinoa flour and include high protein polyunsaturated fatty acids and fiber to balance out the carbohydrates. Macronutrients are well within the National Academy of Medicine's recommended ratios.

A 4.5-ounce packet of Vite Ramen (soy sauce chicken) has

575 milligrams of sodium, 70 grams of carbohydrates, 30 grams of protein, 7 grams of fiber, 2 grams of sugar, 1.3 grams of saturated fat, 14 grams of cholesterol and 500 calories. Each packet also has at least 25% of daily requirements for 27 vitamins and minerals.

The vast difference in ingredients translates into vastly different tastes. While generic ramen is salt dominant, Vite Ramen has a more neutral flavor and a grittier texture. The three packs of ingredients need rigorous stirring into the hot noodles. Flavors linger. A little added salt works well.

Vite Ramen is available in vegan miso, garlic pork and soy sauce chicken in six (\$25.50) and nine (\$33.95) packs. Specials are regularly offered on the company site (viteramen.com) or via its free newsletter. Discounts are available for students, military personnel and first responders.



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