Hershey Rolls Out Chocolate Spreads

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This photo provided by Hershey's shows a new line of chocolate spreads, including a hazelnut variety reminiscent of Nutella, a spread made by the Italian company Ferrero. The company announced the new product on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2013. **(AP Photo/The Hershey Company)**

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans apparently like smearing their foods with chocolatey spreads.

The Hershey Co. on Wednesday said it was introducing a line of chocolate spreads, including a hazelnut variety reminiscent of Nutella, a spread made by the Italian company Ferrero.

The move points to the strong growth in the category; over the past five years, sales of Nutella in the U.S. have more than tripled to $240.4 million, according to market researcher Euromonitor International.

In 2012, J.M. Smucker Co. also got into the game with its Jif hazelnut spreads.

Hershey wants people to try putting the chocolate spread on a variety of foods, saying in a statement that it's a "snack enhancer" for items such as graham crackers, strawberries, pineapples and even pickles.

Anna Lingeris, a Hershey spokeswoman, noted that the most common uses for chocolate spreads are pairings with fruit. But she says Hershey will feature the "endless possibilities" for its spreads in national TV ads set to start airing on Monday.

"People are seeing the permission to try it on carrots and try it on celery," she said, noting that chocolate is "one of America's favorite snacks."

As for Nutella (pronounced "new-tell-uh," according to its website), fans use it in a variety of ways, with some even saying they just eat it straight out of the jar. Its site shows the spread in a wholesome light, on what appears to be a slice of whole

wheat bread, alongside a fruit and glasses of orange juice and milk. Hershey's site meanwhile features a jar of its spread amid apples, strawberries, pretzels and celery.

Lingeris said Hershey's spreads have been available since early December, although national marketing is just now starting.

The spreads have chocolate flavor, but aren't primarily chocolate. Nutella's ingredients, for example, include sugar, palm oil, hazelnuts, cocoa and skim milk. A call to the Ferrero's U.S. headquarters wasn't immediately returned.

Adding chocolate spreads clearly make fruits and vegetables more indulgent snacks, with two tablespoons containing about 200 calories, 12 grams of fat and 20 grams of sugar for both the Nutella and Hershey varieties.

Meanwhile, Hershey recently touted its efforts to reduce the calories in its products. The Hershey, Pa.-based company is part of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation, a collation of 16 major food makers that has said it will work to reduce obesity. For its part, Hershey says it has reduced the calories in its products by offering portion-controlled packaging, changing recipes and developing new products, such as offerings with reduced sugar and fat.

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