



Korean Ladder Study Note

얼큰하다 / 담백하다 / 매콤달콤

Intermediate Flavor Adjectives Beyond Spicy and Sweet

Level	Topic	Focus
B2 · Upper-Intermediate TOPIK 4	Vocabulary Food & Dining	얼큰하다 / 담백하다 / 매콤달콤 Intermediate Flavor Adjectives Beyond Spicy and Sweet

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-B2-VOCAB-FOO-001>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZLt2v-vcgw>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Here's my restaurant problem. I know 매워요 and 달아요, but my Korean friends say 국물이 얼큰하다, 생선이 담백하다, and 양념치킨이 매콤달콤하다. What am I missing?

좋은 질문이에요. Korean taste words often describe the feeling of the food, not just the basic flavor.

Today's core set is 얼큰하다, 칼칼하다, 담백하다, 고소하다, 느끼하다, and 매콤달콤하다. The key is matching each word with the right kind of dish.

Frame first. We are not memorizing six dictionary labels. We are learning food pairings Koreans actually use.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	이 찌개 국물 진짜 얼큰하네요. —	This stew broth is really hearty-spicy.



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	네, 칼칼해서 밥이랑 잘 어울려요. —	Yes, it has a sharp spicy kick, so it goes well with rice.
Hana	생선은 담백하고, 나물은 고소해요. —	The fish is clean and light, and the greens are nutty-savory.
Junho	양념치킨은 매콤달콤해서 계속 먹게 돼요. —	The seasoned chicken is spicy-sweet, so I keep eating it.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
얼큰하다 · 칼칼하다 · 담백하다 · 고소하다 · 느끼하다 · 매콤달콤하다 eolkeunhada · kalkalhada · dambaekada · gosohada · neukkihada · maeko mdalkomhada	hearty spicy · sharp spicy · clean/light · nutty-savory · greasy/rich · spicy-sweet	Today's core set is 얼큰하다, 칼칼하다, 담백하다, 고소하다, 느끼하다, and 매콤달콤하다. The key is matching each word with the right kind of dish.
맛 표현은 음식과 같이 배워요 mat pyohyeoneun eumsikgwa gachi baewoyo	Learn taste expressions together with food pairings.	Frame first. We are not memorizing six dictionary labels. We are learning food pairings Koreans actually use.
얼큰하다 eolkeunhada	spicy, warming, and hearty, especially for broth	First, 얼큰하다. It describes a spicy broth or soup that feels hot, hearty, and warming. You often hear it with 국물, 찌개, 탕, or 해장국.
칼칼하다 kalkalhada	sharp, clean, throat-tingling spicy	Right. Now 칼칼하다. This is a sharper, cleaner spicy feeling, almost a little tingle in the throat. It feels more pointed than 얼큰하다.
얼큰하다 vs 칼칼하다 eolkeunhada vs kalkalhada	hearty spicy vs sharp spicy	Use the contrast like this. 얼큰하다 feels round and hearty. 칼칼하다 feels sharp and clean.
담백하다 dambaekada	clean, light, not greasy, not overpowering	Next, 담백하다. This means clean, light, not oily, and not too strongly seasoned. It is often a compliment for savory food.
담백하다 / 싱겁다 dambaekada / singgeopda	clean and light / bland or under-seasoned	Exactly. Bland is 싱겁다 when there is not enough salt or flavor. 담백하다 means the flavor is clean and balanced.



Word	Meaning	Example
고소하다 gosohada	nutty, toasted, sesame-like, gently savory	Now 고소하다. This is nutty, roasted, sesame-like, or gently savory. Think sesame oil, toasted beans, nuts, and sometimes crispy pancakes.



Grammar / Structure Notes

얼큰하다 · 칼칼하다 · 담백하다 · 고소하다 · 느끼하다 · 매콤달콤하다

얼큰하다 · 칼칼하다 · 담백하다 · 고소하다 · 느끼하다 · 매콤달콤하다 — hearty spicy · sharp spicy · clean/light · nutty-savory · greasy/rich · spicy-sweet

Learn the word together with the dish it naturally describes.

맛 표현은 음식과 같이 배워요

맛 표현은 음식과 같이 배워요 — Learn taste expressions together with food pairings.

Collocation matters.

얼큰하다

얼큰하다 — spicy, warming, and hearty, especially for broth

Common with 국물, 찌개, 탕, 해장국

국물이 얼큰해요.

국물 + 이 + 얼큰해요. — The broth is spicy and warming.

국물이 얼큰해요. In English, the broth is pleasantly spicy and warming. This is usually praise.

칼칼하다

칼칼하다 — sharp, clean, throat-tingling spicy

Common with 국물, 라면, 매운탕

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
얼큰한 국물로 추천해 주세요.	eoIkeunhan gungmullo chucheon hae juseyo.
국물	gungmul → gungmul
이 생선 담백해서 맛있어요.	i saengseon dambaekaeseo masisseoyo.
너무 느끼하지 않은 걸로 추천해 주세요.	neomu neukkihaji aneun geollo chucheon hae juseyo.

Self-Check

- 1 Say 얼큰하다 / 담백하다 / 매콤달콤 three times: slow, natural, then inside a short sentence.
- 2 Write one original sentence that was not in the video.
- 3 Rewatch the YouTube lesson and pause when the same pattern appears.

Related / Subsequent Studies



Lesson	Why study it next	Link
고기 / 생선 / 채소 / 과일 Grocery and Ingredient Categories	A2 Vocabulary: compare 고기 / 생선 / 채소 / 과일 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-VOCAB-FOO-002
군것질 / 간식 / 후식 Snacks, Nibbles, and Dessert	A1 Vocabulary: compare 군것질 / 간식 / 후식 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-VOCAB-FOO-005
김치찌개 / 비빔밥 / 불고기 Naming Korea's Most Ordered Dishes	A1 Vocabulary: compare 김치찌개 / 비빔밥 / 불고기 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-VOCAB-FOO-004
맵다 / 짜다 / 달다 / 시다 Describing How Food Tastes	A2 Vocabulary: compare 맵다 / 짜다 / 달다 / 시다 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-VOCAB-FOO-001

My Notes

Your ladder to fluent Korean. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.