

Salt reduction

The Facts

Information from FDF –
the voice of the food
and drink sector

Salt: industry's efforts make a difference

Salt reduction has long been a priority for members of the Food and Drink Federation – with some sectors having started their reformulation efforts way back in the 1980s. Our work has accelerated since 2004, when FDF and its members unveiled a health and wellbeing action plan that emphasised our industry's commitment to reducing the levels of sugar, fat and salt in our products.

Thanks to these efforts, the UK food and drink industry is now widely seen as leading the world when it comes to reformulating products – and extending consumer choice through the development of 'lower salt' variants of popular brands. Indeed, a survey of our leading members shows that at least £15bn worth of foods now have less fat, sugar and salt. In addition, a further £11.5bn worth of products have been launched as 'lower in' variants. The table on the right highlights some of the groundbreaking work undertaken by members of FDF.

Our members' progress has recently been confirmed by independent research showing that British shoppers saved the equivalent of almost 2,000 tonnes of salt in their total purchases in five important food categories over a 12-month period.

The new research, conducted by TNS Worldpanel, is based on analysis of the information on the nutrition labels of 100,000 food and drink products bought from the country's leading supermarkets by 25,000 households.

As the table on the right shows, TNS Worldpanel found that the categories experiencing some of the biggest reductions in their contribution of salt included crisps, breakfast cereals, bread, home cooking products (such as sauces and table salt) and canned goods.

Reformulation: an ongoing process

Category	Industry achievements
Bread	Sodium levels have reduced by 25% since the late 1980s and recently by a further 5% in sliced bread
Breakfast cereals	Members of the Association of Cereal Food Manufacturers have achieved a 43% reduction in the salt levels of branded breakfast cereals since 1998.
Cakes, buns and biscuits	Since the start of 2006, salt reductions of between 16% and 50% have been achieved by members of FDF's Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery sector group.
Crisps and savoury snacks	Sodium levels have reduced significantly in the past decade – for instance, in potato crisps they are 25% lower. Members of the SNACMA trade association have committed to achieving a further reduction of 10% by 2010.
Meat products	FDF's meat group, the British Meat Processors Association and the Meat and Livestock Commission have established a two-year action plan to build on previous reductions in sodium content by setting upper limits for eight meat product categories.
Ambient soups and meal sauces	Project Neptune, a partnership between industry and the Food Standards Agency, completed a three-year action plan on salt reduction in August 2006. On average, meal sauces achieved an overall reduction of 28.8% and soups an overall reduction of 24.5%.

Peter East, a Director of TNS Worldpanel, said: "Our research shows that despite a buoyant retail food market, where spend grew by 4.5% in the past year, and underlying volumes are up by around 2%, purchasing of salt is actually in decline. The average consumer purchased 0.3% less salt in the past 12 months, which clearly shows that the focus placed on the salt content of food by the Food Standards Agency, industry and others has had a significant effect on consumer behaviour – particularly in those food categories that have been most under scrutiny in recent years."

The success of this reformulation drive by manufacturers and retailers is also highlighted by the results of research conducted by the FSA showing that average daily salt intake has reduced by 0.5g to 9g compared with 2001. While small, this is still a significant reduction. And with industry's continued salt reduction efforts, the FSA expects to see a further drop in average daily salt intake when it publishes new research later in 2008.

The big number

2,000 tonnes

British shoppers saved the equivalent of almost 2,000 tonnes of salt in their total purchases in five important food categories over a 12-month period, according to TNS Worldpanel.

Year on year changes

Product	Reductions
Bread	238 tonnes
Breakfast Cereals	238 tonnes
Crisps	200 tonnes
Canned goods	106 tonnes
Home cooking products	1,200 tonnes

Source: These findings are based on TNS Worldpanel data for the 12 months from October 2006 to October 2007. TNS Worldpanel monitors the household grocery purchasing habits of 25,000 demographically representative households in Great Britain.

If you want information about anything in this newsletter,
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Food and Drink
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Frequently asked questions

Why do you still use salt in food?

Salt has always played an important role in food production – salt curing was one of the earliest known forms of preservation, for instance.

Today, salt is still used as a preservative; it influences flavour; it improves texture; and it has other important technical functions (such as controlling yeast fermentation in breadmaking).

One common misconception is that salt can easily be removed from manufactured products. But, by removing salt, many well loved brands could change significantly. This is particularly true of taste and texture – so it's important that changes to popular products are made gradually to ensure that consumer acceptability is maintained. Consumers will not eat food that they believe does not taste good. Many leading brands have successfully reduced their salt content over a number of years, gradually re-educating consumer palates so that the changes have gone unnoticed!

Why does the term sodium appear on labels?

Manufacturers declare sodium on their labels in accordance with European and UK labelling regulations.

Don't forget: not all sodium appears in products in the form of common salt. Examples of non-salt sodium include other preservatives such as sodium bicarbonate used in baked goods as well as the sodium that is found naturally in milk and eggs.

However, given the consumer interest in this issue, leading FDF members have for a number of years been including salt equivalence information in the nutrition information panel on their products, alongside the legally required figure for sodium.

In addition, our members are increasingly putting information on the front of packs that clearly highlights the salt content of their products. Easily recognisable GDA, or Guideline Daily Amount, labels are now used by more than 60 companies and feature on the front of more than 20,000 product lines. GDA labelling appears on more than half of all food packs sold in the UK – making it the most consistent, well known and widely available front-of-pack labelling scheme in the UK. The GDA for salt is 6g. Packs using this labelling clearly declare the salt content of the product in grams and as a percentage of this GDA.

Where does that 6g figure come from?

Based on the latest scientific advice, adults should aim to consume no more than 6g of salt a day. The figures are lower for children and teenagers. This 6g GDA figure is at the heart of the Food Standards Agency's advice on salt consumption. The FSA has been working closely with FDF and its members on salt reduction, particularly its 2010 targets, and we support the aim of its consumer information campaign to raise awareness of the importance of checking salt levels in food – something made much easier by GDA labelling. Significant progress is being made thanks to the reformulation efforts of manufacturers – although recent FSA research shows we are still eating an average of 9g of salt a day.

How can you claim to be leading the world on salt reformulation?

It's not just industry saying this. Leading health campaigners have publicly acknowledged the positive impact of industry's reformulation efforts. For instance: in 2007, Professor Graham MacGregor, founder of Consensus Action on Salt and Health, said: "The UK is leading the world on salt reduction – many of our food manufacturers should be congratulated on the effort they have made to reduce the amount of salt they add to our foods." And in the same year, the Department of Health praised the industry's work on salt reduction as an example of best practice in a report called 'Partnerships for Better Health'. The report singled out the Project Neptune initiative outlined elsewhere in this fact sheet as well as highlighting the work carried out by other sectors, including cereals manufacturers and bakers, as part of an industry-wide commitment to salt reduction in conjunction with the Food Standards Agency. The partnership on salt reduction that has been achieved here in the UK – and the impressive results we are seeing – is now being used by the European Commission as the model for encouraging other EU Member States to implement similar programmes in their own countries.

About FDF

The Food and Drink Federation is the voice of the UK food and drink industry, the largest manufacturing sector in the country.

FDF's membership comprises manufacturers of all sizes as well as trade associations and groups dealing with specific sectors of the industry.

Our role is to help our members operate in an appropriately regulated marketplace to maximise their competitiveness. We communicate our industry's values and concerns to Government, regulators, consumers and the media. We also work in partnership with key players in the food chain to ensure our food is safe and that consumers can have trust in it.

In representing the interests of our members, FDF is focusing on three core priorities:

- Food Safety and Science
- Health and Wellbeing
- Sustainability and Competitiveness

About TNS



the sixth sense of business™

The consumer information in this factsheet is provided by TNS – the global market information and insight group.

Worldpanel is TNS's continuous consumer panel sector, delivering insight into consumer purchasing and usage habits on a local and global scale.

TNS Worldpanel's coverage extends to more than 50 countries worldwide with services typically based on continuously monitored samples providing information on purchasing and usage activity.

Worldpanel uses data collection technology that best matches the development of the environment it is measuring, including bar code scanners, Internet, till receipt scanning as well as paper diaries and interviewing.

TNS Worldpanel works closely with a wide range of clients including multi-national and local FMCG brand and private label manufacturers, fresh food suppliers, retailers, market analysts and government organisations.