

Salads Photo

2018 Salad Survey: Give us back our healthy choice!

Action on Salt

Eating meals out of home is an increasingly frequent option for many of us in today's time-poor world. In fact, 95% of us bought food 'on the go' over 2016 and 2017, spending £508 each, and for 15% of 15-44 year olds eating lunch 'on-the-go' was an everyday occurrence¹. Grabbing something healthy, in addition to convenience, is important to us, with sales of salads forming 9% of the total food on-the-go market, increasing to 11.5% between 2016 and 2017¹.

Action on Salt first surveyed the salt content of salads – a fool proof 'healthy' choice – back in 2005, but found that they were anything but healthy, with a fifth of the 81 salads surveyed containing 3g of salt or more per portion. The average salt content per portion was 1.64g but only 22% had the amount of salt per portion labelled on pack².

By 2010, some progress had been made, with the average salt content coming down to 1.26g per portion. However, of the 270 salads surveyed in 2010, a worrying 10% had more salt than a Big Mac (2.1g). The saltiest salad in the survey, a Spicy Crayfish Noodle salad from EAT had 3.5g of salt, more than half of the recommended intake limit of 6g per day, demonstrating that there was still progress to be made³.

An update in 2014 looked at 650 salads available in supermarkets, restaurants, cafes and fast food restaurants. More than three quarters (77%) had more salt per portion than a packet of crisps (0.5g). The saltiest salad available was Pizza Express' Grand Chicken Caesar Salad, with 5.3g of salt per serving – almost as much salt as the recommended daily limit for adults of 6g⁴.

The saltiest retailer salad was Morrisons Chicken & Bacon Pasta Salad, with 2.8g of salt per 290g serving. On a positive note, however, the average salt content of supermarket salads had reduced between 2010 and 2014, from 1.26g to 1.05g per portion⁵.

Action on Salt have revisited the salad category to see what progress has been made with salt reduction over the past four years, and to determine if salads are now less salty since last surveyed.

Salt and Health

Eating too much salt is bad for our health: a high salt diet raises our blood pressure and increases our risk of having a stroke or a heart attack.

In the UK, we are still eating more salt than the maximum recommended amount of 6g per day for adults, less for children.

However, most people do not know that they are consuming too much, as around 75% of the salt we eat is already present in processed and packaged foods we buy at the supermarket, including products that don't necessarily taste salty, such as bread, breakfast cereals, cakes and ready meals.

METHODS

Action on Salt surveyed all available retailer salads that would typically be eaten for lunch, available in the 'food to go' or the deli sections of each supermarket, totalling 316 salads. Nutrition data was collected in April 2018 from product packaging and online in Aldi, Asda, Boots, Iceland, Lidl, Marks & Spencer, Morrison's, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Cooperative and Waitrose.

Action on Salt also surveyed the salt content of all available takeout salads available in cafes, fast food outlets and restaurants including Abokado, ASK Italian, Benugo, EAT, Starbucks, Costa, Pret a Manger, Pizza Express, Caffe Nero, POD, Itsu, Yo! Sushi, LEON, McDonalds, Nandos, Burger King, KFC, Subway, Wagamama, Greggs and Zizzi. Nutrition data for the 214 salads was collected online or by emailing customer services.

Nutrition Labelling

The majority (91%) of retailer salads provided front of pack colour-coded nutrition labelling. However, only Caffè Nero, Costa Coffee and Starbucks offered full nutrition information on pack, while Benugo, POD and Pret A Manger had full nutrition information available on shelf labels. Furthermore, Costa Coffee was the only 'out of home' company to offer colour-coded nutrition information.

Without colour-coded nutrition labelling on pack or at the point of purchase then it is challenging for consumers to make an informed decision and find the healthier, lower salt option.

Saturated Fat

Many salads in this survey had very high levels of fat and saturated fat, with some containing an entire day's worth of saturated fat.

Aldi's Just Tasty Cheese Layered Salad had the most fat per serve of the retailer salads surveyed. With 16.7g of saturated fat, this salad has 84% of the maximum recommended intake⁷. There was a 98% difference in saturated fat content per 100g for all retailer products, demonstrating that, like salt, it is possible to make salads with much less saturated fat. For example, **Boots Prawn Cocktail Salad with Pasta** contains just 0.4g saturates.

For restaurants and fast food chains, the worst was Zizzi's Arcobaleno 'Rainbow' Salad with Goat's Cheese with 20g of saturated fat, the entire maximum recommended intake for adults.

Calories

PHE's recently launched One You '400-600-600' campaign promotes healthier eating, in particular when eating out of the home, with an aim of eating 400 calories for breakfast, 600 calories at lunch and 600 calories at dinner⁸.

Of the 214 restaurant and fast food salads surveyed, 13% (27) provided more than 600 calories per portion, with the worst offender being **Pizza Express Grand Chicken Caesar with Dough Sticks** and **Pizza Express Pollo with Dough Sticks** containing 1160kcal and 1014kcal respectively.

Just 3% (10) supermarket salads had more than 600kcal, with **Aldi's Just Tasty Cheese Layered Salad** having the most calories – 787kcal per 380g portion.

Portion Size

When buying a salad for lunch from the food to go or deli section of the supermarket, consumers do not expect these to serve more than one person. However, some salads in the survey, despite being the same pack size as salads intended for one, advertise much smaller and unrealistic portion sizes. Consumers will likely eat the whole pack and therefore consume more salt than they think because the nutrition information is based on the smaller recommended, yet unrealistic, serving.

For example, **Morrisons Coronation Chicken Pasta** comes in a 250g pot, which is smaller than the average pack size of 273g. However, the nutrition information of this salad is given per fifth of a pot i.e. 0.45g salt per 50g serving. If a consumer ate the whole pot, they would be adding 2.25g of salt to their daily salt intake, more than a third of the maximum recommended daily intake for adults.

CONCLUSION

This survey highlights the lack of progress made with salt reduction since 2014. Since 2016, Public Health England (PHE) have held responsibility for the UK's salt reduction programme. PHE have not given an indication of how they are tracking the food industry's progress towards achieving the 2017 salt reduction targets. Furthermore, PHE has given no indication if or when the salt reduction targets will be reset.

We recommend that **PHE reinvigorate the UK's salt reduction programme as a priority**, following the actions laid out in the joint Action on Salt and Action on Sugar healthy eating strategy⁹.

This survey also highlights the need for **increased monitoring of salt levels in restaurant and fast food meals**. Healthier options should be available and **full nutrition labelling displayed at the point of sale** to enable diners to make healthy choices.

