



Retailer, Restaurant and Fast Food Salads

Action on Salt, 2018

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 312 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, Caffè Nero, POD, Itsu, Yo! Sushi, LEON, McDonalds, Nandos, Burger King, KFC, Subway, Wagamama, Greggs and Zizzi. Nutrition data for the 213 salads was collected online or by emailing customer services.

RESULTS

- Average salt content of restaurant and takeaway salads has INCREASED by 13% since 2014
- Average salt content of retailer salads has not changed since 2014
- 82% of retailer salads contain more salt per serve than a packet of ready-salted crisps
- Salt is not the only issue - some salads contained more than three quarters of daily recommended saturated fat intake, not to mention excessive calories

Restaurant and Fast Food Salads

Worryingly, the average salt content of restaurant and fast food salads has increased since 2014, rising from 1.65g to 1.86g per portion. This must serve as a warning for the government that the out of home sector needs much more guidance on reformulation and rigorous monitoring of salt levels.

Of the 213 salads surveyed, one in three (36%) contained 2g of salt or more per portion – at least a third of the maximum daily recommended salt intake limit for adults.

Saltiest Culprits

Nandos and Pizza Express were the worst offenders. **Nando's Mediterranean Salad** with chicken and extra hot spice has 6.2g per serve - more salt than the entire recommended daily limit for adults. **Pizza Express' Grand Chicken Caesar with Dough Sticks** contains 5.3g per serve, the same amount of salt as it did in 2014⁵.

McDonald's 'healthier' choice of **Grilled Chicken and Bacon Salad with Balsamic Style Dressing** surprisingly contains the same amount of salt as a McDonald's Cheeseburger.

Even salads targeted at health conscious individuals contain surprisingly high amounts of salt:

- **Benugo's Supercharged Omega Salmon** has 3.5g salt
- **Zizzi's Super Zucca Salad With Chicken**, has 2.8g salt per salad
- **POD's Protein Box** has 2.7g salt per salad

Retailer Salads

The average salt per serving of the 312 salads surveyed was 1.06g, compared to 1.05g in 2014, clearly highlighting the lack of progress made with salt reduction in this category, due to lack of guidance from the government.

The saltiest retailer salad in the survey – **Marks and Spencer Teriyaki Chicken Sticky Rice Salad** (280g) – had 3.50g of salt per serve, more than half the recommended daily limit of 6g for adults. In comparison, **Tesco Wicked Kitchen Kung Fu Bowl (240g)** has just 0.48g of salt per serving, making it more than 7 times less salty than the saltiest salad.

257 (82%) of retailer salads had more salt than a packet of ready-salted crisps (0.46g⁶) compared to 79% in 2014. Furthermore, 21 (7%) were classed as high in salt with more than 1.8g per portion and just 52 (17%) of salads were low in salt, with 0.3g of salt per 100g or less.

Salad Type and Salt Content by Category

Of the retailer salads, rice-based salads were the saltiest, with an average salt content of 0.58g per 100g. In comparison, noodle-based salads had 29% less salt, with an average salt content of 0.41g per 100g.

Interestingly there was at least a 70% difference in salt per 100g between salads in the same salad category, which clearly demonstrates that it is possible for salads to be made with much less salt. Using pasta salads as an example, **Morrisons Chicken & Bacon Pasta Salad**, with 2.54g of salt per 250g pack, was 4 times as salty as **Asda Spicy Chicken Pasta**, with 0.60g of salt per 300g.

Nutrition Labelling

The majority (91%) of retailer salads provided front of pack colour-coded nutrition labelling. 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. However, 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 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, **Sainsbury's On the Go Cheese & Tomato Pasta** has 4.5g of saturated fat.

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 213 restaurant and fast food salads surveyed, 8% (17) 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, we would 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 colour-coded nutrition labelling displayed at the point of sale** to enable diners to make healthy choices.

Top Tips for a Healthier Lunchtime

Check the label for salt and use the FoodSwitch app to find healthier supermarket salads

Avoid salads with salty ingredients (e.g. feta, parmesan, olives, sundried tomatoes, bacon, capers, anchovies, smoked meat and fish)

Use salad dressing sparingly - or better still none at all! - if it's provided in a pot on the side. Go for ones without dressing where possible. When eating out ask for the dressing on the side so that you can determine how much (or little) to use

Beware of misleading portion sizes - nutrition info 'per serving' may be for ¼ or ½ pot etc and not the whole pack, so check to see if you're eating this amount or more

Make your own! You can control what you put in – choose less salty ingredients like beans, chickpeas, plenty of fresh colourful vegetables, salad leaves, lean meat and fish and add herbs, balsamic vinegar or lemon juice for flavour instead of salt, salty dressings and sauces like mayo

REFERENCES

1. The Grocer <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/reports/digital-features/food-on-the-move-report-2017/time-to-shape-up-how-food-and-drink-to-go-can-get-healthier/558586.article>
2. Action on Salt <http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/news/surveys/2005/salad/#d.en.487032>
3. Action on Salt <http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/news/surveys/2010/salads/#d.en.487143>
4. NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/salt-nutrition/>
5. Action on Salt <http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/news/surveys/2014/salads/#d.en.487222>
6. Walkers <https://www.walkers.co.uk/crisps-range/walkers-crisps/ready-salted>
7. NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/different-fats-nutrition/>
8. Public Health England <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/44-one-you>
9. Action on Salt <http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/news/salt-in-the-news/2018/items/the-conversation-continues>

NB: Action on Salt could only include out of home salads that had nutrition information available online. Some restaurants choose not to provide this information though, including Pho, who gave all nutrition information but omit salt content data.

About Us:

Action on Salt (formerly Consensus Action on Salt and Health) is a group concerned with salt and its effects on health, supported by 24 expert scientific members. Action on Salt is successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high salt diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of salt in processed foods as well as salt added to cooking, and at the table.

Enquiries:

Mhairi Brown, ANutr

Action on Salt

T: 0207 882 5941

E: mhairi.brown@qmul.ac.uk

Follow Us:



@actiononsalt



@EatLessSalt



www.actiononsalt.org.uk

Have you tried the FoodSwitch App?

FoodSwitch UK allows you to scan the barcode of food and drink products and instantly see whether they are **high**, **medium** or **low** in fat, saturates, sugars and salt.



It also searches the database for similar but healthier alternative products, making it easier than ever to switch to healthier food choices.

There are 5 different filters to choose from, so whether you are looking to lower your blood pressure, reduce your saturated fat (saturates) and sugar intake, or cut back on your calories, **FoodSwitch UK** can help. Click here to find out more about how it works.

Use **FoodSwitch UK** to see what's in your shopping basket, and make better food choices when shopping for you and your family. **FoodSwitch UK** is available as a free, UK-only download from iTunes and Google Play.