

SALT OUT OUR SANDWICHES!

The hidden health risk in the UK's lunch-on-the-go



New research reveals excessive salt levels in many of the UK's most popular sandwiches, highlighting the urgent need for stronger reformulation policies.

SUMMARY

This briefing summarises findings from Action on Salt & Sugar's analysis of sandwiches sold across UK retailers, coffee chains and food-to-go outlets.

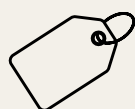
The findings reveal alarmingly high and inconsistent levels of salt across many products, with some containing more salt than an adult should consume in an entire day.

This demonstrates that lower salt sandwiches are achievable, yet voluntary reformulation efforts from the food industry continue to fall short. This reinforces the need for mandatory salt reduction targets, stronger accountability and improved nutrition standards across retail and out-of-home food.

KEY FINDINGS



1 in 10 sandwiches exceed salt targets



44% would receive a red warning label for salt



25% of sandwiches classified as 'less healthy'

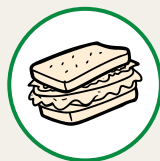
Excess salt levels were identified across sandwiches sold in supermarkets, coffee chains and food-to-go outlets - with one sandwich found to contain over 6g of salt.

The large variation between similar products demonstrates that **lower salt formulations are achievable**.

Consumers are often **unaware of the salt content** of sandwiches purchased out of home, due to **inconsistent, or even absent, nutrition labelling**.

Current voluntary salt reduction measures are **failing** to deliver meaningful progress.

GAIL's Smoked Chicken Caesar Club contained more salt than an adult's maximum limit within a single sandwich.



Equivalent to nearly five McDonald's Cheeseburgers



Salt reduction remains one of the most cost-effective public health interventions available to government

WHY THIS MATTERS

HEALTH IMPACT

- Excess salt intake raises blood pressure
- High blood pressure is the leading modifiable risk factor for stroke and heart disease
- Cardiovascular disease affects over 8 million people in the UK
- Most dietary salt comes from processed and manufactured foods

POLICY CONTEXT

- UK salt reduction has stalled since 2014
- No major national salt awareness campaign in over 15 years
- Average salt intake remains 40% above maximum limits
- Reformulation has proven possible where government action has been stronger

WHAT GOVERNMENT MUST DO

1 Publish the salt reduction targets progress review and set out next steps

Urgently release a comprehensive review of compliance, clearly identifying where targets have been met, missed or stalled. This should be accompanied by clear next steps, including revised targets, timeframes and accountability mechanisms to address under-performance.

2 Reintegrate salt reduction as a core pillar of food and obesity policy

Salt reduction should be explicitly embedded into wider food and obesity policy frameworks via:

- Mandatory, time-bound salt reduction targets
- Explicit inclusion of salt within the Healthy Food Standard, alongside mandatory reporting
- Consistent application of the 2018 Nutrient Profiling Model across all food policy, with no category-based exemptions for high salt foods.

3 Accelerate reformulation through fiscal and regulatory measures

Building on the success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL), the government should explore targeted fiscal measures to incentivise reformulation of high salt products, increase healthier options, and create a level playing field across industry.

4 Strengthen nutrition information across retail and out of home food

Where regulatory levers allow, this should include front-of-pack labelling for foods manufactured and sold within the UK, as well as extending clear and consistent nutrition labelling to the out-of-home (OOH) sector. Improved visibility of salt content would support informed choice and provide additional incentive for reformulation.

Salt reduction is a proven, equitable and highly cost-effective strategy that works. Reinstating salt reduction as a national prevention priority would help reduce cardiovascular disease, tackle health inequalities and relieve long term pressure on the NHS. Government must act now.

ABOUT ACTION ON SALT & SUGAR



Action on Salt & Sugar is a non-profit organisation, based at Queen Mary University of London, working to improve population health and food environments through impactful food and drink nutritional research. We inform policy, influence the food industry, raise awareness, and build advocacy for salt and sugar reformulation.

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