



# Salt Awareness Week 2018

How much salt is in our favourite Chinese takeaways and ready meals?

**12th – 18th March 2018 marks our 19th annual Salt Awareness Week**  
**This year we are highlighting the importance of reducing how much salt EVERYONE eats, regardless of age or gender**

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<sup>1</sup>. Many believe that the health effects of eating too much salt are only a cause for concern in our later years. However this is not true, as the effects of eating too much salt on blood pressure starts early in childhood and tracks into adulthood and later life. That is why it is so important that all members of the family, including children, reduce their salt intake. By doing so we can reduce our risk of heart disease, live longer and healthier lives, and reduce the burden on our over-stretched NHS.

In the UK, we are still eating more salt than the maximum recommended amount of 6g per day for adults, less for children<sup>2,3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

Research from Cancer Research UK has revealed that as a nation we eat more than 100 million takeaways and ready meals every week<sup>5</sup> and a 2017 poll found that the nation's favourite takeaway meal was a Chinese<sup>6</sup>.

Our recent survey focused on Chinese takeaway restaurants dishes and supermarket Chinese ready meals, to highlight the shocking and excessive levels of salt we are unwittingly adding to our diet.

## SALT AWARENESS WEEK SURVEY

Action on Salt surveyed 269 supermarket Chinese ready meals, side dishes and dipping sauces across supermarket shelves and takeaway restaurants in January 2018. Product data was collected from packaging and online from all ranges in supermarkets including Aldi, Asda, Iceland, Lidl, Marks & Spencer, Morrison's, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Cooperative and Waitrose.

A small sample of Chinese takeaway meals were also collected from six restaurants chosen at random from London's famous Chinatown: Four Seasons, Gerrards Corner, Hungs, Lido, Wan Chai Corner and Wong Kei. We purchased five popular Chinese dishes from each outlet: vegetable chow mein, sweet and sour chicken, beef in black bean sauce, Szechuan beef and egg fried rice. Vegetable spring rolls and prawn crackers were bought from two restaurants, chosen at random.

The amount of salt in the takeaway meals was analysed for total sodium by independent public analysts.

## Takeaways

Most takeaway meals (97%) contained at least 2g of salt per portion, and more than half had more than 3g of salt per serve – a shocking 50% of the maximum recommended limit in just ONE dish, and more salt than eight bags of ready salted crisps<sup>7</sup>.

The saltiest takeaway meal combination – beef in black bean sauce with vegetable noodles from Wong Kei restaurant – contained 11.50g salt, which is almost **double** the maximum recommended limit of salt for an adult.

There was also huge variation in the salt content of the same meal-types from different restaurants. For example, there was a 64% difference in salt content per 100g of sweet and sour chicken dishes, which ranged from 0.27-0.75g/100g. Similarly, the salt content of Szechuan Beef dishes ranged from 0.67-1.42g per 100g, and the saltiest dish had double the salt of the least salty (4.60g v 2.30g).

Overall, our takeaway data suggests that of the dishes surveyed, beef in black bean sauce were the saltiest, with an average salt content of 1.27g/100g, compared to sweet and sour dishes, with the lowest average salt content of 0.54g/100g.

## Supermarket Ready Meals

Nearly half (43%) of the ready meals surveyed would be considered high in salt, giving them a red warning label on front of pack.

The saltiest ready meal surveyed was *Slimming World's Chinese Style Banquet Rice*, sold in Iceland, with a shocking 4.40g salt per 550g pack; that's more salt than in two store bought Pizza Express Margherita Pizzas. In fact, of the 16 Chinese ready meals surveyed in Iceland, 12 (75%) had more than 2g of salt per portion.

Ready meals containing Peking duck or crispy aromatic duck were the most salty across all supermarkets, with an average salt content of 0.88g per 100g, closely followed by black bean dishes, which had on average 0.80g/100g.

Ready meals containing the least amount of salt were curry-based or sweet and sour, with average salt contents of 0.54g/100g and 0.56g/100g respectively.

## Supermarket Side Dishes

### Rice

*Iceland Takeaway Egg Fried Rice* was the saltiest rice side dish, with 4.1g salt per 350g pack, more salt than 11 packets of ready salted crisps<sup>7</sup>. In comparison, *Tesco Egg Fried Rice* had just 0.1g per 250g pack! This shows the importance of shopping around and switching to the lower salt option in helping to keep your the total salt content of your meal as low as possible.

### Noodles

The average salt content of noodle side dishes (0.42g/100g) was lower than rice side dishes (0.56g/100g). *The Co-operative Soy and Ginger Noodles*, with 1.01g per 132.5g portion, had more than double the salt content of *Marks and Spencer Chilli & Coriander Noodles* (0.45g per 150g portion).

### Prawn Crackers

All prawn crackers included in this survey were high in salt and would have a red front-of-pack warning label. The saltiest was *Marks and Spencer Prawn Crackers* with 2.15g/100g and 0.55g of salt per 25g portion. The least salty, although still high in salt, was *Tesco Prawn Crackers* with 1.6g/100g and 0.3g of salt per 20g portion.

### Prawn Toast

The average salt content of prawn toasts was 0.93g/100g. Just two toasts of *Sainsbury's 8 Prawn Toasts* would add 0.67g of salt to your meal. The least salty were *Waitrose Chinese Prawn Toasts* with 0.42g of salt in two toasts.

### Spring Rolls

The saltiest spring rolls were *Marks & Spencer 6 Vegetable Spring Rolls*: a portion of two would add almost 1g of salt to your diet. In comparison *The Co-operative Vegetable Spring Rolls* had 0.36g of salt in a portion of two rolls.

### Sides and Table/Dipping Sauces

Of the 56 sauces included in our survey, a worrying 50 (89%) were high in salt, with a red front-of-pack warning label. Soy sauces were by far the saltiest, with an average salt content more than five times saltier than that of seawater<sup>8</sup>. *ASDA Dark Soy Sauce* has 19.3g of salt per 100ml, and 2.9g per 15ml portion, which is more salt than eight bags of salted crisps<sup>7</sup>.

While we know that soy sauce is salty, we can benefit from shopping around and switching to an alternative brand: this product was almost 3 times as salty as the lowest salt soy sauce (*Sainsbury's Reduced Salt Dark Soy Sauce*, 7.10g/100g).

### Recommendations

The variation in salt content found in both takeaway dishes and supermarket ready meals clearly demonstrates that the high levels of salt in the saltiest products are completely unnecessary, and could easily be reformulated to contain less salt.

A decade ago, the UK led the world in salt reduction. In 2006 the Food Standards Agency (FSA), together with Action on Salt, set salt reduction targets for over 80 categories of food which the food industry voluntarily adhered to. New, lower targets were set in 2008 to be met by 2012 and as a result, UK salt intake fell from 9.5g in 2003 to 8.1g per day in 2011, one of the lowest intakes in the developed world<sup>9</sup>.

However, in 2011, responsibility for salt reduction fell to the Department of Health, under the Public Health Responsibility Deal. As a result, the food industry became responsible for policing itself and salt levels, with little action taken to ensure the reset 2017 targets were achieved.

Following the 2015 election the Responsibility Deal was dissolved and our successful reduction programme was halted. In 2017, Public Health England assumed responsibility of the programme.

- Our main recommendation is to **the government**. Immediate action must be taken to **reinvigorate the UK's salt reduction programme**
- **New salt reduction targets** must be set for supermarkets, and out-of-home outlets including takeaways and restaurants, and progress must be regularly and transparently monitored
- The government should also **endorse warning labels to high salt meals, both in supermarkets and on menus in takeaways and restaurants**, which would allow customers to make much more informed choices.

### Top Tips for Healthier Mealtimes

- When ordering food at a restaurant or for a takeaway, ask for less or no salt where possible
- Watch portion size – what's recommended on pack is often less than you would have and portion sizes of takeaway dishes are typically far bigger.
- Swap to a less salty dish when choosing your takeaway. When it come to Chinese, we found black bean dishes are typically saltier than a sweet and sour dish
- Use alternative seasonings to flavour your meal, such as delicious herbs and spices including (but not limited to) chilli, garlic, ginger, fennel seeds and Szechuan pepper. Citrus works well too!
- Choosing plain rice or noodles as a side rather than fried/flavoured varieties can lower the amount of salt you eat. Better yet, plain wholemeal varieties provide more fibre
- Use plenty of fresh veg like baby corn, broccoli, carrots, courgettes or mangetout and add herbs and spices for flavour rather than salty stir fry sauces
- Use dipping and table sauces sparingly and go for reduced salt versions where available
- Use the free **FoodSwitch UK app** to find healthier alternatives. There's a **SaltSwitch filter** to help you find similar choices with less salt.



## Action on Salt:

Action on Salt, formerly Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH), is a group concerned with salt and its effects on health, supported by 22 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.

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6. Payment Sense (2017). What is the nation's favourite cuisine? <https://www.paymentsense.co.uk/blog/what-is-the-uks-favourite-cuisine/>
7. A bag of Walkers Ready Salted Crisps (25g) contains 0.35g salt <https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/254926800>
8. Atlantic seawater contains 1.0g of sodium per 100g, which equates to 2.5g of salt per 100g.
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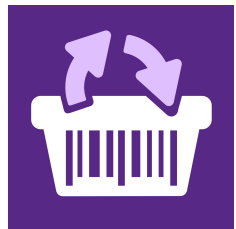


[www.actiononsalt.org.uk](http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk)

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## 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.

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Table 1: Salt content of example supermarket meal combinations

| Retailer         | Product Name                                                        | Category       | Pack Size (g) | Serving Size (g) | Salt Per Serve (g) |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Iceland          | Slimming World Chinese Style Banquet Rice 550g                      | Fried Rice     | 550           | na               | 4.40               |
| Iceland          | Iceland 10 Duck Spring Rolls 200g                                   | Spring Rolls   | 200           | 20               | 0.20               |
| Sharwood's       | Sharwood's Prawn Crackers 60g                                       | Prawn Crackers | 60            | 30               | 0.51               |
| Blue Dragon      | Blue Dragon Original Sweet Chilli Sauce 300ml                       | Sweet Chilli   | 300ml         | na               | 0.65               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>5.76</b>        |
| Morrisons        | Morrisons Chinese Chicken in Black Bean Sauce & Egg Fried Rice 450g | Black Bean     | 450           | 420              | 3.50               |
| Morrisons        | Morrisons Crackers Prawn 80g                                        | Prawn Crackers | 80            | 20               | 0.50               |
| Morrisons        | Morrisons Chinese Takeaway Chicken Spring Rolls 240g                | Spring Rolls   | 240           | 60               | 0.63               |
| Morrisons        | Morrisons Sweet Chilli Dipping Sauce                                | Sweet Chilli   | 200           | 36               | 1.00               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>5.63</b>        |
| Marks & Spencer  | Marks & Spencer Crispy Sweet & Sour Chicken Banquet 500g            | Sweet & Sour   | 500           | 500              | 4.13               |
| Marks & Spencer  | M&S Spring Rolls 6 Vegetable 215g                                   | Spring Rolls   | 215           | 35.5             | 0.48               |
| Marks & Spencer  | M&S Prawn Crackers 50g                                              | Prawn Crackers | 50            | 25               | 0.55               |
| Marks & Spencer  | M&S Sweet Chilli Dipping Sauce 300ml                                | Sweet Chilli   | 230           | na               | 0.38               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>5.54</b>        |
| Waitrose         | Waitrose Chinese Chicken Chow Mein 400g                             | Chow Mein      | 400           | 400              | 3.80               |
| Waitrose         | Waitrose 6 Duck Spring Rolls 216g                                   | Spring Rolls   | 216           | 36               | 0.24               |
| Waitrose         | Waitrose Light & Crunchy Prawn Crackers                             | Prawn Crackers | 50            | 25               | 0.54               |
| Waitrose         | Waitrose Cooks Ingredients Sweet Chilli Sauce                       | Sweet Chilli   | 295           | 30               | 0.88               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>5.46</b>        |
| Sainsbury's      | Sainsbury's Beef in Black Bean Sauce with Egg Fried Rice 450g       | Black Bean     | 450           | 450              | 3.96               |
| Sainsbury's      | Sainsbury's 6 Hoisin Duck Spring Rolls 240g                         | Spring Rolls   | 240           | 80               | 0.81               |
| Sainsbury's      | Sainsbury's Prawn Crackers 80g                                      | Prawn Crackers | 80            | 25               | 0.46               |
| Sainsbury's      | Sainsbury's Sweet Chilli Sauce 300g                                 | Sweet Chilli   | 300           | 15               | 0.19               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>5.42</b>        |
| The Co-Operative | Coop Chicken Chow Mein 450g                                         | Chow Mein      | 450           | 450              | 3.42               |
| The Co-Operative | Coop Vegetable Spring Rolls 200g                                    | Spring Rolls   | 200           | 100              | 0.36               |
| Sharwood's       | Sharwood's Prawn Crackers 60g                                       | Prawn Crackers | 60            | 30               | 0.51               |
| Blue Dragon      | Blue Dragon Original Sweet Chilli Sauce 300ml                       | Sweet Chilli   | 300ml         | na               | 0.65               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>4.94</b>        |
| Lidl             | Chef Select Chow Mein Chicken 400g                                  | Chow Mein      | 400           | 400              | 2.83               |
| Lidl             | Snaktastic Crackers Prawn 100g                                      | Prawn Crackers | 100           | 25               | 0.54               |
| Blue Dragon      | Blue Dragon Original Sweet Chilli Sauce 300ml                       | Sweet Chilli   | 300ml         | na               | 0.65               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>4.02</b>        |
| ASDA             | Asda Chinese Chicken Curry 450g                                     | Curry          | 450           | 225              | 1.50               |
| ASDA             | Asda Chicken Fried Rice 400g                                        | Fried Rice     | 400           | 200              | 1.10               |
| ASDA             | Asda Prawn Crackers 40g                                             | Prawn Crackers | 40            | 20               | 0.41               |
| ASDA             | Asda 4 Hoisin Duck Spring Rolls 240g                                | Spring Rolls   | 200           | 50               | 0.46               |
| ASDA             | Asda Sweet Chilli Sauce 200ml                                       | Sweet Chilli   | 200ml         | 15ml             | 0.21               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>3.68</b>        |
| Aldi             | Simply Bistro Chicken Sweet & Sour 400g                             | Sweet & Sour   | 400           | 400              | 2.40               |
| Aldi             | Worldwide Foods Fried Rice Egg Classic 250g                         | Egg Fried Rice | 250           | 125              | 0.54               |
| Aldi             | Asian Cuisine Spring Rolls 4 Vegetable 240g                         | Spring Rolls   | 240           | 60               | 0.36               |
| Aldi             | Asia Specialities Sweet Chilli Sauce 300g                           | Sweet Chilli   | 300           | 15               | 0.25               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>3.55</b>        |
| Tesco            | Tesco Chicken in Black Bean 350g                                    | Black Bean     | 350           | 318              | 2.10               |
| Tesco            | Tesco 4 Duck Spring Rolls 200g                                      | Spring Rolls   | 200           | 49               | 0.50               |
| Tesco            | Tesco Prawn Crackers 60g                                            | Prawn Crackers | 60            | 20               | 0.30               |
| Tesco            | Tesco's Egg Fried Rice 250g                                         | Egg Fried Rice | 250           | 245              | 0.10               |
| Tesco            | Tesco Sweet Chilli Dipping Sauce 290g                               | Sweet Chilli   | 290           | 58               | 0.52               |
|                  |                                                                     |                |               | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>3.52</b>        |

*For full survey data, please visit [www.actiononsalt.org.uk](http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk) or email [mhairi.brown@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:mhairi.brown@qmul.ac.uk)*