



# ACTION ON SALT SAVOURY FINGER FOOD

As the weather grows warmer, eating outdoors is a popular option for many. The average Brit picnics at least three times a year- in the UK alone, there is an estimated 94 million picnics per year<sup>1</sup>. A typical picnic basket in the UK varies but the classics - sausage rolls, scotch eggs, pork pies and olives – are firm favourites.

Savoury finger foods can be eaten hot or cold, on their own or as part of a meal and so it's no surprise that these products aren't just appearing in our picnic baskets; they feature in our lunchboxes, as light evening meal options and even as bar snacks. In fact, the humble quiche was added to the Office for National Statistics shopping basket - which tracks price changes in commonly bought items in the UK - in 2018 due to its popularity<sup>2</sup>.

In both 2016 and 2017, sales of meat snacks increased and in 2017

alone, consumers added an extra £34m to the savoury pastries and meat snack markets<sup>3</sup>.

As the 'low carb' trend continues to increase in popularity, sales of meat snacks and other savoury finger foods, along with their vegetarian equivalents, will only rise further.

Worryingly, Public Health England's 2018 Progress Report, which analysed how far the food industry had come to meeting the 2017 salt reduction targets, highlighted that many savoury finger foods were not meeting their targets, including almost half of branded pork pies and half of branded quiches<sup>4</sup>.

Action on Salt investigated the salt levels in traditional picnic items and savoury finger foods to determine just how much salt they are adding to our diet, if healthier options are available and, if so, if reformulation to lower salt content is possible.

## SURVEY DETAILS

Action on Salt surveyed all available cooked savoury finger foods in the chilled aisle of Aldi, Asda, Iceland, Lidl, Marks & Spencer, Morrison's, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Cooperative and Waitrose.

In total, 555 products were surveyed including:

- Scotch eggs
- Quiche
- Sausage rolls
- Pork pies
- Antipasti
- Cooked packs of meat.

All vegetarian equivalents of these products were included.

Nutrition data were collected in May 2019 from product packaging.

## SALT AND YOUR 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. However, most people do not know that they are consuming too much, as around three quarters of the salt we eat is already present in processed and packaged foods we buy at the supermarket and restaurants.



# RESULTS

- A **quarter** of savoury picnic foods are **HIGH** in salt
- Some **olives** contain double the salt concentration of **seawater**
- 16% of products are higher in salt than their **maximum salt targets**
- Almost a third of products have no **colour-coded front of pack labelling** - of these, 44% are **HIGH** in salt

## The Salt Offenders

A quarter (25%) of the products we surveyed were high in salt and would receive a red front of pack label for salt. The saltiest categories were olives, with an average salt content of 2.89g per 100g, followed by cocktail sausages with an average salt content of 1.36g/100g.

Table 1: Examples of saltiest products (per 100g)

Brand	Product	Salt content (per 100g)
Aldi	Specially Selected Hand Stuffed Halkidiki Olives 150g	5g
Peperami	Original Peperami Minis 100g	4.1g
Asda	Balsamic-Glazed Mini Chorizo 110g	4.2g
Marks & Spencer	Stone in Basil & Garlic Marinated Olive Selection 180g	3.88g
Waitrose	Queen Green Olives with Cumin & Lemon 180g	3.74g

While we know that olives are a salty product, some had shocking levels of salt - **Aldi Specially Selected Hand Stuffed Halkidiki Olives 150g** have 5g of salt per 100g which is double the salt concentration of seawater<sup>5</sup> and three and a half times the salt content of salted crisps. With 1.9g per portion, this product has a third of an adult's daily recommended limit of salt<sup>6</sup> in just 5 olives.

Just eight products were low in salt, with a green front of pack label for salt, including **Sainsbury's Broccoli, Tomato & Cheese Quiche 400g** with 0.22g of salt per 100g. In fact, quiche, with an average salt content of 0.54g per 100g and scotch eggs, with an average salt content of 0.76g per 100g, were the lowest salt categories. We only found retailer scotch eggs on the days of data collection, and our survey revealed that 20% of scotch eggs exceeded the maximum target (0.78g per 100g).

## Portion Size

Just 7% of products did not provide a portion size but, of these products, nearly three quarters were high in salt. Many of the products without a specified portion size were olives but where olive portion sizes were available, there is a huge variation - from 32g (which is just 5 olives) up to 130g.

**Marks & Spencer Stone In Full Bodied Greek Kalmata Olives 264g** suggest a 130g portion but with 3.25g of salt per 100g, this product would provide a massive 4.23g of salt!

## Saltiest Products per Portion

Aside from olives, some of the products with the highest salt per portion include:

- **Ginsters Cornish Pasty 272g** with 2.99g of salt per portion, equivalent to 7 portions of salted peanuts<sup>7</sup>
- **Aldi Eat & Go Sausages & Ketchup** with 2.2g per portion, equivalent to 4 and a half bags of salted crisps<sup>8</sup>
- **Fry's Spicy 3 Bean Pasty 200g** with 1.8g of salt per portion, equivalent to the salt levels in a McDonald's hamburger and fries<sup>9</sup>

## TIPS FOR HEALTHIER SNACKING AND PICNIC BASKETS

- Check the label to see how much salt and saturated fat levels are in your favourite products and use the FoodSwitch app to find healthier options
- Try to avoid products with salty ingredients such as chorizo, anchovies, sun dried tomatoes and feta
- Add some colour to your picnic by buying seasonal fruits – why not make some fruit kebabs? A colourful and healthy snack, which the kids will love!
- Make your own! Fresh salads, sandwiches with wholemeal bread, vegetable crudité's with houmous, boiled egg, grilled chicken or seafood will add fibre, protein and essential vitamins to your family's picnic
- Fill half your plate with fresh salad or vegetables and if you are adding salty sauces to your food, use sparingly!
- Check the portion size! Read the label to find out the recommended portion size and measure out a portion onto a plate to help ensure you don't eat more salt, calories and saturated fat than intended

## Variation in Salt Content

There was a huge variation in the salt content across all of the product categories we surveyed, demonstrating that reformulation is easily achievable.

Table 2: Variation in salt content within each product category

Category	High Salt Example		Low Salt Example		Difference in Salt Content
	Product	Salt per 100g	Product	Salt per 100g	
Sausage Rolls	Ginsters Large Sausage Roll 130g	1.16g	Aldi Everyday Essentials 8 Sausage Rolls 480g	0.53g	2 times more salt
Falafel	Gosh! Mediterranean Falafel with Chickpea and Parsley	1.4g	Cauldron Middle Eastern Falafels 200g	0.4g	3.5 times more salt
Chicken	M&S Just Add Chicken Tikka Mini Fillets 120g	1.33g	Asda Tandoori Chicken Breast Mini Fillets 200g	0.36g	3.5 times more salt

Action on Salt highlighted in October 2018 that vegetarian and vegan products can be higher in salt than their meat equivalents<sup>10</sup>. This survey has revealed similar results. For example, the saltiest sausage roll in this survey was **Fry's Sausage Roll 80g** – a vegan brand - with 1.8g salt per 100g and 1.4g of salt per portion – more salt than two portions of salted peanuts.

Interestingly, meat alternatives can also be saltier in the out of home sector, which includes restaurants and fast food outlets. Gregg's recently launched a vegan sausage roll which contains 1.8g salt per 100g (1.9g per portion) making it more salty than their regular sausage roll, which contains 1.5g per 100g (1.6g per portion)<sup>11</sup>.



## Salt Targets

The UK's salt reduction programme, established in the early 2000s, involves setting voluntary salt reduction targets across food products including bread, ready meals and cakes.

The targets are regularly reviewed and reset to progressively lower targets so that salt content is gradually reduced. When salt is reduced slowly, our taste buds have time to adjust and so consumers do not notice the change in taste and can continue to buy the same products.

In 2014, targets were set across 76 categories of food, to be met by 2017. However in 2018, Public Health England released an analysis of progress made towards these targets, which found a fifth (19%) of retail products did not meet their maximum targets.

Table 3: Examples of salt targets relevant to the survey

Category	Target	Maximum Salt Level
Sausage Rolls and Pork Pies	1.4.1 Delicatessen, pork pies and sausage rolls	0.78g per 100g
Quiche	21.1 Quiches	0.68g per 100g
Scotch Eggs	22.1 Scotch Eggs	0.78g per 100g
Falafel	25.2 Meat-free products	1.25g per 100g

Of the 555 products surveyed, 372 had a maximum salt target. Of these, 17% had more salt than their maximum target, including

- **Higgidy Bold & Earthy Spinach, Feta & Roasted Tomato Quiche 155g** – 0.89g/100g but salt target = 0.68g/100g
- **Pork Farms Original Medium Pork Pie** - 1.32g/100g but salt target = 1g/100g

PHE's 2018 report revealed that overall, retailers had made better progress with salt reduction than manufacturers.

## Saturated Fat

Salt is not the only issue with these products - 47% were high in saturated fat. A diet high in saturated fat can lead to an increase in cholesterol levels in our blood, which increases the risk of developing heart disease. The daily recommended limit of saturated fat for adults is 30g for men and 20g for women<sup>12</sup> but data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey reveals we're all currently eating more than this<sup>13</sup>. The product with the most saturated fat per portion was **Ginsters Large Cornish Pasty 272g** with 19.1g of saturated fat per portion and, on average, quiches and tarts had the highest saturated fat per portion with 9.7g – as much saturated fat as in 3 McDonald's hamburgers<sup>14</sup>.

Similar to salt content, there was a variation in saturated fat content within product categories. **Asda Extra Special Maple Cured Smoked Bacon Quiche Lorraine with Butter Enriched Shortcrust Pastry 410g** has 11g of saturated fat per 100g and a huge 14g per portion but lower fat versions are available including their own **Asda Smartprice Cheese & Bacon Quiche** with 7g per 100g and almost half the amount per portion (9g). Consumers are paying more for what may appear to be a 'better quality' product - £2.59 v £1.20 - but in reality, they are getting a product that could be harming their heart health in the long run.

## Typical Picnic

As part of a typical picnic, it can be very easy to consume huge levels of salt and saturated fat in one sitting. While vegetarian products are lower in saturated fat, their health halo is concealing lots of salt.



Table 4: Examples of typical picnic baskets

Meat-Based Picnic Basket	Manufacturer Recommended Portion Size	Vegetarian-Based Picnic Basket	Manufacturer Recommended Portion Size
Asda Smartprice Cheese & Bacon Quiche	One Third (133g)	Higgidy Bold & Earthy Spinach, Feta & Roasted Tomato Quiche	One Quiche (155g)
The Co-operative Ready to Eat Snack Pork Pies	One Pork Pie		
Aldi Crestwood Puff Pastry Sausage Rolls	One Sausage Roll	Fry's Sausage Roll	One Sausage Roll
Aldi Specially Selected Hand Stuffed Halkidki Olives	Five Olives	Aldi Specially Selected Hand Stuffed Halkidki Olives	Five Olives
Asda Savoury Mini Eggs	One Mini Egg	Quorn Mini Savoury Eggs	Three Mini Eggs
<b>Total Salt</b>	<b>4.21g</b>	<b>Total Salt</b>	<b>5.37g</b>
<b>Total Saturated Fat</b>	<b>24.6g</b>	<b>Total Saturated Fat</b>	<b>17.3g</b>

## FoP Labelling

Almost a third (29%) of products have no colour-coded front of pack (FoP) labelling, making it difficult for consumers to tell at a glance if the product is high in salt, fat, saturated fat and sugars.

Of those products without FoP labelling, more than 40% are high in salt and many are olive products which do not have a salt target and have been excluded from the UK's salt reduction programme. Furthermore, 32% of the products with no FoP labelling are high in saturated fat.

## CONCLUSION

This survey highlights the levels of salt and saturated fat in popular savoury finger food and picnic favourites. While it is positive that lower salt options are available, a third of products do not have front of pack labelling and suggested portion sizes vary widely. We knew that progress towards the 2017 salt reduction targets was mixed, but this survey shows that 16% of products still do not meet their maximum targets, two years after they were due to be accomplished.

While we were pleased to see salt mentioned in the Green Paper '*Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s*'<sup>15</sup>, the proposed plans must be bold and strictly monitored to ensure food companies prioritise salt reduction and actually meet the 2023 targets. The Green Paper only mentions a 2024 monitoring report which is a year after the targets are due to be met, but voluntary reformulation programmes are only successful if there is a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism in place to keep pressure on the food industry. The government must ensure they avoid the disaster of the salt reduction strategy under the Public Health Responsibility Deal<sup>16</sup>.

The UK's salt reduction programme was once world leading and it's time to get it back on track for the benefit of health and the economy.

Action on Salt recommend the Government implement the following actions:

- Release **guidance** for the food industry on how to meet the salt reduction targets, including the use of **potassium salt**, to engage industry in the need to reduce salt. If the targets are not met by 2023, Government must **make the voluntary targets mandatory**
- Set **much stricter targets** for the **out of home sector** and monitor their progress to bring them in line with progress made by the retail sector
- Develop a **public awareness campaign** on salt so that consumers are aware of the dangers salt poses to health

### About Action on Salt

Action on Salt 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.

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### References

1. [National Picnic Week Facts](#)
2. [Office for National Statistics, 2018](#)
3. [The Grocer, 2017](#)
4. [Public Health England 2018](#)
5. Atlantic seawater contains 1.0g of sodium per 100g, which equates to 2.5g of salt per 100g
6. [Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, 2003](#)
7. [A 30g portion of KP Original Salted Peanuts 250g contains 0.39g of salt](#)
8. [A standard 32.5g packet of Walkers Ready Salted Crisps contains 0.46g of salt](#)
9. [A McDonald's Hamburger and Medium Fries contains 1.82g salt](#)
10. [Action on Salt, 2018](#)
11. [Greggs nutrition information](#)
12. [NHS Guidelines](#)
13. [Public Health England, 2018](#)
14. [A McDonald's Hamburger has 3.3g of saturated fat](#)
15. [Department of Health and Social Care, 2019](#)
16. [MacGregor Graham A, He Feng J, Pombo-Rodrigues Sonia. Food and the responsibility deal: how the salt reduction strategy was derailed. BMJ 2015; 350:h1936](#)

## 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.

