

FEBRUARY 2026



SOUPS

A SNAPSHOT INTO THE SALT
CONTENT OF READY-TO-EAT SOUP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soups are often perceived as a healthier choice at mealtimes, yet many contain unnecessarily high levels of salt. This report examines the salt content of chilled and ambient ready-to-eat soups, sold in major UK retailers. The analysis aims to enhance the understanding of salt levels in manufactured foods and to utilise these findings to help inform more effective food and public health policies.



Key findings at a glance

- Analysis of 481 ready-to-eat soups sold in major UK retailers shows that almost **one in four (23%)** exceed UK salt reduction targets.
- The average salt content across all products was **0.53g/100g, with levels ranging from 0.1-1.6g/100g**. This wide variation demonstrates that lower-salt formulations are achievable and already on the market.
- **Some soups contain more than double** the maximum salt target for soup, with a single suggested portion delivering more than half (>3g) of an adult's maximum daily limit
- **Manufacturer-branded soups are notably saltier** than retailer own-label products.

What needs to happen

Fiscal levers to drive reformulation

We need targeted levies on food and drink high in fat, salt and sugars, including those sold out of home, building on the proven success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy.

Mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling

We need a mandatory labelling system on all food and drink to better inform consumers and drive reformulation.

Strengthen Healthy Sales Reporting & application of Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM)

Reporting from all businesses must be comprehensive, using a consistent set of indicators that capture nutrients of concern, including salt and free sugars. The updated NPM should be applied consistently across existing policies that use it, and its scope broadened to cover all food and drink categories.



THE ISSUE

There is overwhelming evidence linking excess salt consumption to raised blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of death and disability. In the UK, up to 75% dietary salt comes from processed and packaged foods, not from salt added during cooking or at the table. According to data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS), staple foods such as bread, cheese, meat and soup feature among the top contributors to overall salt intake in the diet [1]. Ready-to-eat soups make up a sizeable part of the UK food market and are a popular choice for many, reflecting consumer demand for convenience. Sales continue to grow, and in 2024, the total volume of soups and broths consumed in the UK was around 297,000 tonnes [2].

Soups are widely considered a healthy, light and nutritious meal, but because they are consumed frequently and in relatively large portions, even modestly elevated salt levels can make a substantial contribution to overall salt intake at the population level.

The food industry therefore plays a crucial role in reducing population salt intake through product reformulation, a process that can be achieved gradually, without compromising taste or business profits. This snapshot report examines the salt content of ready-to-eat soups sold in the UK, assessing industry compliance with voluntary salt reduction targets and identifying patterns and differences across businesses.

WHAT WE FOUND

Overall salt levels

Mean salt content: 0.53g/100g, ranging from 0.1-1.6g/100g

One in six (16%) would have a red warning label on front of pack for high salt content, and only 2% would be green.

Table 1. Average salt content of ready-to-eat soup, by manufacturer and retailer

Company	Number of products	Salt g/100g (range)
All	481	0.53 (0.10-1.60)
Manufacturer	200	0.60 (0.10-1.60)
Retailer	281	0.49 (0.25-0.95)

Portion distortion

When typical portion sizes are taken into account, the average salt content per serving was 1.43g, but this varied widely, ranging from as little as 0.2g to as much as 4.7g in a single suggested serving.

Serving sizes declared on pack were highly inconsistent, spanning 147.5 - 500g, often failing to reflect realistic consumption. This variability risks misleading consumers and obscuring the true salt contribution of ready-to-eat soups.



200g portion

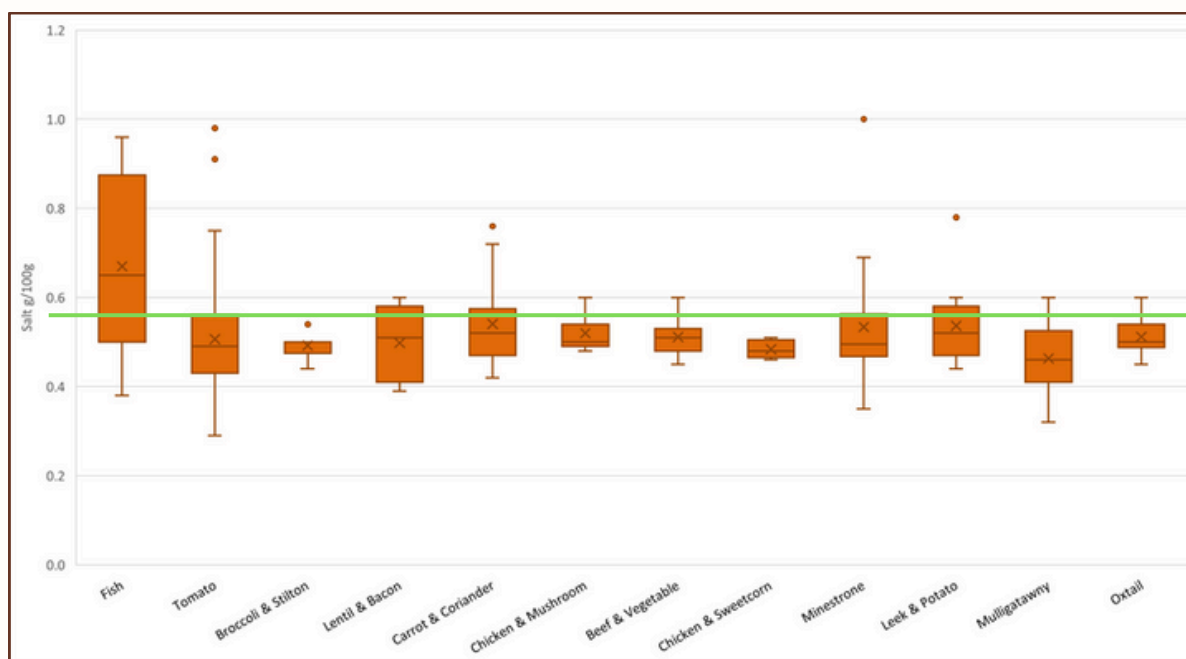


400g portion

Flavour matters

Salt content varied substantially in soups, both between different soup flavours and within the same flavour type. Some flavour categories were higher in salt than others, but even within individual flavour profiles, there was considerable variation in salt content between comparable products. The presence of lower salt options within the same flavour sub-category demonstrates that reformulation is feasible.

Figure 1. Distribution of salt content in widely available soup flavours.

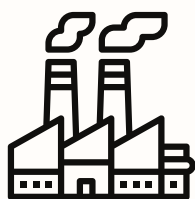


Green line denotes the maximum salt target for soup (0.59g/100g)

Salt reduction targets: progress and gaps

UK salt reduction targets for soups aim to drive gradual reformulation across the food sector. However, this analysis shows uneven progress, ongoing non-compliance in soups, and clear differences by brand type.

Approximately 1 in 4 soups (23%) exceed the maximum salt target



Manufacturer-branded soups had a greater proportion exceeding the maximum salt target (48%)



Retailer own-label soups showed much higher compliance, with only 6% exceeding the maximum salt target

Several brands had average salt levels at or above the maximum salt target, alongside a higher share of products exceeding the maximum target. Examples include*:

- **Mr. Organic** – average salt 0.73g/100g; 88% exceeding maximum salt target.
- **Crosse & Blackwell** – average salt 0.60g/100g; 27% exceeding maximum salt target.

Heinz - a market leader for soup - has an average salt content of 0.57g/100g, yet more than two-thirds (68%) exceed the maximum salt target.

In contrast, several brands and retailers achieved full compliance against the salt targets, and collectively have on average around 22% less salt compared with the companies above.

These findings indicate that while reformulation is achievable, progress has not been delivered consistently across the market, likely the result of a voluntary system that does not adequately incentivise businesses to reformulate.

- ✓ Tesco
- ✓ Sainsbury's
- ✓ New Covent Garden Soup Co
- ✓ Morrisons
- ✓ Co- op
- ✓ Waitrose
- ✓ Lidl

**100%
compliance
to max salt
target**

*Analysis of brand level compliance included only businesses with 5 or more soups in the dataset

CONCLUSIONS

Voluntary action has delivered uneven progress

While some manufacturers have reduced salt, progress remains inconsistent and not in line with the guidelines. Products with very high salt levels continue to be sold alongside lower-salt alternatives, with no penalties on businesses for non-compliance.

Reformulation is feasible

The two- to four-fold difference in salt content between similar soups demonstrates that technical barriers to salt reduction are not the limiting factor. Lower-salt soups already exist, are commercially viable, and are widely available on the market.

Healthier choices should not rely on consumer effort alone

Expecting consumers to identify and choose lower-salt products places responsibility on individuals, despite the majority of salt in our diets already being present in the foods we buy. Inconsistent and unrealistic portion sizes further distort true salt intake, increasing the burden on consumers and misleading them into believing they are consuming less salt than they actually are.



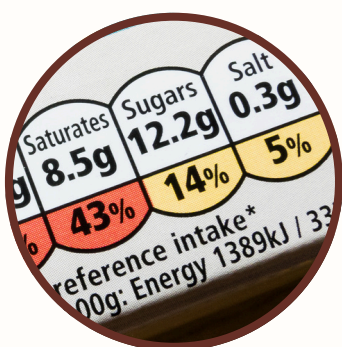
RECOMMENDATIONS

To support population health and reduce preventable cardiovascular disease, we need to:



Introduce fiscal levers to drive reformulation

The Government must introduce targeted levies on food and drink high in fat, salt and sugar, including the out-of-home sector, building on the proven success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy. Such measures would incentivise reformulation, encourage healthier purchasing, generate revenue for prevention and public health, and level the playing field for businesses already reducing salt and sugar.



Mandate front-of-pack labelling

The current voluntary system is trusted but inconsistently applied, it allows manipulation through unrealistic portion sizes, and excludes out of home foods. A mandatory, regularly reviewed labelling system aligned with public health guidance is needed to support informed consumer choice and encourage industry-wide reformulation.



Ensure Healthy Sales Reporting and Nutrient Profile Model deliver maximum impact

We welcome the Government's commitment to a Healthy Foods Standard and to updating the Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) as part of the 10 Year Health Plan. To deliver meaningful impact, they must be comprehensive and resistant to loopholes. Businesses should report on the nutritional quality of all food and drink sales, using indicators that capture nutrients of concern, particularly salt and free sugars, and be linked to clear, time-bound targets to drive sustained improvements. Additionally, the updated NPM must be applied consistently across all food and drink categories for all relevant policies, including labelling, health and nutrition claims, and advertising, locations and promotions restrictions, to ensure that products high in salt are not exempt by category.



ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data for the full nutrition, ingredients, product weight, serving size and price for chilled and ambient ready-to-eat soups was collected in July 2025 online and instore, from eleven major retailers (Aldi, Asda, Iceland, Lidl, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Ocado, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Co-operative and Waitrose) following strict inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Pre-packaged canned, condensed, ambient and fresh soups sold in England, as consumed. • Branded and own-label products • All types and cuisines, including Thai, Italian, vegetable and meat-based etc • Products with complete nutrition information per 100g/ml and per serving	• Powdered or dehydrated soups • Foodservice and deli-counter soups (i.e. not pre-packaged) • Soups with missing nutrition information • Duplicate products with identical nutrition information – only 1 product included

All companies with 5 or more products were contacted and given the opportunity for data verification, including front of pack traffic light labelling and compliance with salt reduction targets.

Please note, only products available for purchase in large supermarket chains in England were included in this report and may not reflect a business' complete portfolio.

Data Analysis

The nutritional content per 100g and per portion of each product was analysed against government initiatives to encourage industry reformulation. This includes assessment of front of pack nutrition labelling [3] as well as compliance to the Department of Health's voluntary 2024 salt reduction targets [4].



REFERENCES

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- [3] Department of Health. 2016. Guide to creating a front of pack (FoP) nutrition label for pre-packed products sold through retail outlets. https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fop-guidance_0.pdf
- [4] Public Health England. 2020. Salt reduction: targets for 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/salt-reduction-targets-for-2024>

Action on Salt & Sugar

Action on Salt and Sugar is a registered UK charity (1098818) based at Queen Mary University of London, working to improve population health and food environments through impactful research on the nutritional content of food and drink. We inform policy, influence the food industry, raise awareness, and build advocacy for salt and sugar reformulation

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