

New data may help nutrition monitoring

September 26 2014, by Suzi Phillips

A new combination of household food purchases and nutrition data is being used to assess population exposure to sodium, saturated fat, and sugar in New Zealand.

"It will also help to identify key opportunities for reformulation of processed foods with the largest potential population health benefits," says Dr Helen Eyles, a research fellow at the National Institute for Health Innovation (NIHI) at the University of Auckland.

Since 2011, NIHI researchers have done annual systematic surveys of the nutrient composition of packaged foods available in New Zealand supermarkets and [fast food restaurants](#) (the Nutritrack database), and recently they combined these data with market research data on [food sales](#) (from Nielsen).

Analyses were undertaken using data for more than 16,800 packaged, processed New Zealand food and non-alcoholic beverage products (\$3.7 billion total annual sales).

Crude and sales-weighted means (weighted by number of units sold) were calculated overall and by food category, and major contributors to household purchases of sodium, [saturated fat](#), and sugar were identified.

Bread remains the single biggest source of dietary sodium (salt) and a primary target for a continued focus on reformulation, intervention, and policy change. Secondary yet still important targets for sodium reduction are processed meats, savoury sauces, cheese, and edible oils (margarine,

butter, and spreads).

Corresponding targets for saturated fat reduction are edible oils, cheese, and biscuits, which combined account for about 48 percent of saturated fat purchased by New Zealand households.

"For New Zealanders to meet the new suggested WHO guideline for sugar intake, food manufacturers should work on reducing sugar in biscuits, chocolate and sweets, and soft drinks, particularly as these are foods consumed in high quantities by New Zealand children," says Dr Eyles.

"Increased consumer awareness via targeted nutrition education campaigns and policies is also important, especially as plain sugar, which is unlikely to be reformulated, is the top contributor to sugar purchases in New Zealand."

"Our findings support those of previous analyses we have done of Australian and United Kingdom processed foods," says Cliona Ni Mhurchu, Professor of Population Nutrition at NIHL.

"Such data could be used to provide independent evaluation of the impact of industry initiatives, national nutrition interventions, and policies to improve the [processed food](#) supply."

Provided by University of Auckland

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