

App makes low salt and gluten-free shopping easy

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Glutenswitch App showing the traffic light colours for a product. Red indicates a less healthy choice, amber a good choice and green is even better.

Low salt and gluten-free food products will be easy to identify using an updated smart-phone app that helps New Zealanders to shop healthy.

This week is World Salt Awareness Week and organisers are encouraging consumers to read [food](#) labels and choose foods with less

salt, and for food companies to provide low salt options.

The revised app enables shoppers to look out for hidden salt in products when they are grocery shopping thanks to a new filter - SaltSwitch.

People with coeliac disease or [gluten intolerance](#) can also assess [gluten](#) content when food shopping with the addition of GlutenSwitch to New Zealander's leading food label-scanning app, FoodSwitch.

GlutenSwitch can instantly identify if a scanned food product is likely to contain gluten. It also recommends alternative gluten-free items, listed by order of healthiness.

At the same time, the app shows consumer-friendly traffic lights (red/amber/green) for total fat, saturated fat, sugars, and salt, and information about energy content.

FoodSwitch was developed in Australia by Bupa and The George Institute for Global Health and tailored for New Zealand shoppers by the nutrition team at the National Institute for Health Innovation (NIHI) at the University of Auckland in partnership with Bupa New Zealand.



Saltswitch App includes a list of healthier, lower salt alternatives (and healthy, gluten free alternatives in the case of GlutenSwitch).

In New Zealand FoodSwitch has been downloaded more than 75,000 times since its launch in August 2013.

Lead researcher on the initiative at NIHI, Dr Helen Eyles, said the new filters to the FoodSwitch app would help people with [high blood pressure](#), coeliac disease or gluten intolerance to make healthier food choices.

"Food choices can be really difficult for people managing high blood pressure or with gluten intolerance," she says. "Many fresh or unprocessed foods are low in salt and gluten free, but in reality many of us choose packaged foods for reasons such as convenience and cost."

"And even if you can find a gluten-free alternative it's often very hard to know how healthy it is. GlutenSwitch addresses both these problems," says Dr Eyles.

"We know only a small number of New Zealanders read and understand food labels. FoodSwitch and its new filters make it simple for shoppers to identify the best options for their health and reduce the risks of our biggest killers – heart disease, stroke and cancer," she says.

"Since the launch of FoodSwitch we've had several requests for a version for people concerned about heart health and for a gluten add-on, highlighting unmet needs of consumers."

Bupa New Zealand's Managing Director, Grainne Moss, says it has become clear since the first release of FoodSwitch that there were large communities of people looking for some extra help when it came to healthy [food choices](#).

"Having something without gluten doesn't automatically make it healthy and as with processed foods in general, some gluten-free products may be high in sodium or saturated fat," says Ms Moss.

"This isn't about chasing a fad," she says. "GlutenSwitch helps consumers who need to maintain a gluten-free diet choose the best options for their health."

Users can scan the barcode of packaged food using their smartphone camera to receive immediate, easy to understand nutritional information on close to 30,000 New Zealand supermarket products.

When a product is scanned using the phone's camera, the SaltSwitch filter indicates whether the product is low in salt and if there are healthier, lower [salt](#) options.

The GlutenSwitch filter indicates whether a product is declared gluten-free (by the manufacturer), is gluten-free by ingredient (doesn't contain wheat, spelt, barley, rye and oats, triticale), or contains gluten. It automatically provides suggestions for similar, but healthy gluten-free options.

The updated version of FoodSwitch with Salt and Gluten filters is available as a free download from the New Zealand App Store for iPhone™ 3GS/4/4S/5/5C/5S/6/6S and iPad 2 devices or the Google Marketplace for an Android version.

Apple mobile devices that have a camera with auto-focus require iOS 5.0 or later. Android devices need to be running version 4.4.4 or above.

Provided by University of Auckland

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