

New survey reveals dangerously high salt levels in picnic foods

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Picnic food. Credit: Queen Mary, University of London

A new survey by Action on Salt, based at Queen Mary University of London, has found that the food content of a "typical" picnic basket could contain more than 5g of salt.

The new research, which analyzed 555 savory picnic finger foods available from retailers, found high levels of salt in these products whereby one in four would qualify for a red label on the front of the pack.

As a result, experts from Action on Salt are calling for immediate compulsory front of pack nutritional labeling on picnic savories.

Mhairi Brown, Nutritionist at Action on Salt said: "This survey highlights just how easy it is for consumers to unknowingly eat huge amounts of salt and saturated fat hidden in savory snacks and picnic favorites.

"Food manufacturers must get on board in our efforts to improve the nation's health. We found a large variation in the salt content of product categories proving reformulation is easily achievable. We want to see the [food industry](#) disclosing nutritional information clearly on front of pack on all products so everyone can easily find healthier options."

Double the salt concentration of seawater

The survey found that Aldi Specially Selected Hand Stuffed Halkidiki Olives 150g have 5g of salt per 100g, which is double the salt concentration of seawater. With 1.9g of salt per portion, just five of these olives equates to a third of an adult's daily-recommended limit of salt.

Aside from olives, other products with the highest salt per portion include: Ginsters Cornish Pasty (272g) with 2.99g of salt per portion, equivalent to seven portions of salted peanuts. Aldi Eat & Go Sausages & Ketchup with 2.2g per portion, as much salt as 4.5 bags of ready salted crisps. Fry's Spicy 3 Bean Pasty (200g), 1.8g per portion which is the amount of salt in a McDonald's hamburger and fries.

Salt targets

In 2018, Public Health England (PHE) released an analysis of the food industry's progress towards achieving the 2017 targets, which revealed many of the targets had not been met.

Action on Salt similarly found that half of products surveyed were higher in salt than their average salt targets and 17 percent had more salt than their maximum target.

Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary and Chair of Action on Salt, said: "Due to inaction by the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England in enforcing the 2017 salt reduction targets, the public are still eating more salt than recommended. This is leading to thousands dying or suffering from entirely unnecessary strokes and heart disease.

"Reducing salt is one of the most cost-effective measures to protect health. The time has come for the Secretary of State for Health to resuscitate the UK's salt reduction program, helping us to, once again, be world leading rather than trailing behind the rest of the world. The public's health has suffered long enough."

Front of pack labeling

The survey found that almost one in three products have no color-coded front of pack (FoP) labeling. Consumers may also buy products at the deli counter where no nutrition labeling is available.

Of those products without FoP labeling, more than 40 percent were found to be high in salt, many of which are olive products which do not currently have a specific salt target set by PHE.

There was also a significant variation in the salt content of all product categories surveyed showing reformulation is easily achievable.

Salty picnic basket

The survey reveals that as part of a typical picnic it can be very easy to consume high levels of salt and saturated fat in one sitting. While vegetarian products were found to be lower in saturated fat, they still contain high levels of salt.

Sonia Pombo, Campaign Lead for Action on Salt said: "Picnics are a British favorite but with all the different salty options on offer, it's a sure way of upping your salt intake.

"Eating too much salt puts us at risk of suffering from heart disease or stroke but we are all eating much more salt than the recommended limit of 6g per day, with salt intake in the UK averaging 8g per day.

"The challenge facing consumers is that most of the salt in our diet is already present in the foods we buy and so the government must take action now and ensure the food industry improves the quality of their food for the benefit of our health."

Tips for healthier snacking and picnic baskets

Action on Salt recommend the following tips for healthier choices:

- Check the label to see how much salt and saturated fat levels are in your favorite products and use the FoodSwitch app to find healthier options
- Try to avoid products with salty ingredients such as olives, chorizo, anchovies, sun dried tomatoes and feta

- Add some color to your picnic by buying seasonal fruits or making fruit skewers
- Make your own. Fresh salads, sandwiches with wholemeal bread, vegetable crudités with hummus, boiled egg, grilled chicken or seafood will add fiber, protein and essential vitamins to your family's picnic
- Choose one protein center e.g. a sausage roll or Scotch egg, and then fill the rest of your plate with fresh salad or vegetables
- 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

More information: Find out more about Action on Salt:
www.actiononsalt.org.uk/

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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