

# New survey exposes sauces and marinades with up to ten times the salt concentration of sea water

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A nationwide product survey published today by Action on Salt has exposed the unnecessary levels of salt present in many table sauces, Asian sauces and marinades.

The expert group based at Queen Mary University of London's Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, is today calling on the Government to deliver a detailed and robust salt reduction program for 2020. This should involve extending the salt targets to include categories that have so far been ignored, along with mandated targets for key contributors of salt in the UK diet. Mandatory front of pack color coded labeling across all food and drink is also an urgent necessity.

In Action on Salt's review of 357 products, over one in two sauces (54 percent) are found to be high in salt and would receive a red label on front of pack. What's more, where products do have salt targets set by Government, over a third (38 percent) currently exceed their respective maximum target, despite these targets needing to be met by 2017.

## **Asian sauces**

The saltiest sauces surveyed are Asian sauces, many of which do not have specific salt targets for industry to follow. Whilst 88 percent of Asian sauces are high in salt and would receive a red label on front of pack, the vast majority (80 percent) are lacking front of pack color coded labeling, making it difficult for the consumer to tell at a glance what the salt levels are.

Across all the different sauces, variation in [salt content](#) was evident with some brands containing a fraction of the amount of salt as their competitors (see table 1) demonstrating that reducing salt is possible with no technological implications in doing so.

When it comes to lower-salt varieties, many products are not always readily available in all supermarkets, meaning customers are not given enough options to choose from. Without front of pack labeling, consumers are even less able to tell at a glance which ones are lower in salt.

The saltiest sauce surveyed was Blue Dragon Fish Sauce, with 26.7g/100g salt; just one tablespoon would provide 4g salt—that's TWO THIRDS of an adult's maximum recommended intake for the day, and the equivalent of nearly nine anchovy fillets!

The saltiest dark soy sauces was Lee Kum Kee Premium Dark Soy Sauce & Asda Dark Soy Sauce with 19.3g/100g salt—nearly eight times the concentration of sea water. Just one tablespoon would provide nearly 50 percent of an adult's maximum daily salt intake—the equivalent of six packets of ready salted crisps.

## **"Reduced salt' sauces even saltier**

While only seven products (i.e. a quarter of all soy sauces surveyed) claim 'reduced' salt on the label, some actually contain more salt than 'normal' soy varieties. For example, Amoy Reduced Salt Soy Sauce 11.3g/100g vs. Waitrose Cook's Ingredients Dark Soya Sauce 10.1g/100g.

## **Marinades**

40 sauces surveyed claim to be suitable for marinating. Of these, 58 percent are high in salt and the remainder are amber. One of the saltiest marinades is Nando's Peri-Peri Sauce with 2.2g salt/100g. Unfortunately only seven marinades display color-coded labels on front of packaging.

## Table sauces

261 products were grouped as table sauces including hot sauce, tomato ketchup, mayonnaise and brown sauce, as well as peri-peri and BBQ sauces. Nearly half (44 percent) are considered high in salt (i.e.  $>1.5\text{g}/100\text{g}$ ), with only eleven being classed as 'low' ( $\leq 0.3\text{g}/100\text{g}$ ). Hot sauces were shown to be the saltiest of all table sauces per 100g and were the only table sauce category to not have a definitive salt target.

One of the worst examples is Franks RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce with 8.4g/100ml. The tomato sauce with the lowest salt content was Heinz Tomato Ketchup No Added Sugar & Salt with 0.05g/100g, which has 36x less salt than their original recipe. This clearly demonstrates that it is possible to make a salable product that tastes good.

Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary University of London and Chair of Action on Salt, adds: "The most cost-effective way to reduce cardiovascular disease is salt reduction. The Secretary of State for Health Matt Hancock must now commit Public Health England to setting new and ambitious salt targets for 2020, with strict monitoring mechanisms to ensure all members of the food industry comply. Failing to do so will result in thousands of people suffering or dying from strokes and heart disease. One gram reduction in population salt intake prevents more than 4,000 premature deaths per year in the UK."

Sonia Pombo, Campaign Manager for Action on Salt says: "These sauces

are cupboard staples for many of us but we are unknowingly adding vast amounts of salt to our already salty foods. The message to the government is very clear: set robust salt targets for 2020 which will drive reformulation. This should also include mandatory targets for the main contributors of salt in UK diet so that everyone's health benefits, including the socially deprived. Mandated color coded front of pack labeling should also be implemented immediately so that consumers can make healthier, more informed choices."

Zoe Davies, Nutritionist at Action on Salt explains: "Many of us love to cook and make our food taste good. However, using lots of these salty sauces and marinades could be compromising our health as many of us are still eating more salt than the recommended limit of 6g (1tsp) per day. There are much healthier and tasty alternatives available. Always read the label, or use free apps such as FoodSwitch, which allows customers to scan the barcodes of their shopping to see the 'traffic light colors," and make a healthier choice."

## **Salt targets**

The 2017 salt targets were set back in 2014, and in 2018, Public Health England (PHE) released an analysis of the food industry's progress. The report found that half of the top 15 contributors to salt intake had still not met their average salt targets, including the top three: bread and rolls, bacon and ready meals/meal centers.

The report revealed that table sauces were one of three categories with the lowest number of products at or below the maximum target (60 percent). What's more, data from 2014 suggests many products were already close to achieving their respective 2017 target. Very little progress has since been made with reducing salt levels in these food categories over the last five years.

This survey also highlights those sauces that do not have salt targets including fish sauce, soy sauce and hot sauce. These sauces are extremely high in salt and contribute significantly to the UK diet, yet without a specific target, there is no reason to expect the food industry to reduce the salt content.

A comprehensive salt reduction program now needs to be reignited and the food industry cannot, and must not, be made solely responsible for it. Targets should be made mandatory, with penalties given if they are not met.

## **Does voluntary salt reduction work?**

These findings coincide with a new study published today in the *BMJ Open* which analyzed the salt content of sauces in the UK and in China.

Key UK findings highlight that over the course of the past decade, the salt content of sauces with clearly defined targets mostly decreased while, over the same period of time, the salt content of sauces without targets mostly increased.

Overall, the findings suggest that salt targets (even voluntary ones) can be an effective policy tool as long as there are clear mechanisms for monitoring and penalties for non-compliance.

Companies should also provide a greater duty of care to their customers and assist in driving consumer trends to lower salt varieties. This includes not selling these products at a premium, which unfortunately appears to be the case.

Monique Tan, Ph.D. researcher and lead author of the *BMJ Open* study, adds: "We saw an overall decline in the salt content of sauces sold in the UK over the past 10 years, with the exception of the period between

2013 and 2015, whereby salt levels either plateaued or even increased. This is most likely the knock-on effect of the Responsibility Deal, introduced in 2011, where the responsibility for improving nutrition was taken away from the Foods Standards Agency and entrusted to the food industry. As a result, no salt targets were set for 2014. This disastrous deal derailed UK's [salt](#) reduction program which, as of today, still needs to be put back on track."

**More information:** Monique Tan et al. Salt content of sauces in the UK and China: cross-sectional surveys, *BMJ Open* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-025623](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-025623)

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