Salt

In Northern Ireland, we define the policy for consumers and the food industry on salt. With salt targets in place, we work with the food industry to encourage reductions in the levels of salt in these foods.

High salt intakes contribute to high blood pressure, which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Approximately 75% of the salt we eat is already in the foods we buy - the majority in processed foods.

The UK Government recommends adults and children aged 11 years and over should have no more than 6g salt per day.

Our Eating Well, Choosing Better programme encourages businesses to reduce the levels of sugar, saturated fat and salt in foods which they manufacture and sell.

Salt reduction targets

Revised UK-wide salt reduction targets for 2017 apply to 76 food categories. The revised targets have been developed and agreed by the four UK administrations working closely with industry, NGOs and stakeholders.

These set more challenging and wide-ranging targets than the previous targets for 2012.

The targets recognise the food industry’s progress and aims to encourage further reduction.

Historically, salt levels in many foods have reduced by as much as 40-50% and more than 11 million kilograms of salt have been removed. However, average salt consumption in the UK remains high – 8.1g to 8.8g a day – so there is still more work to be done to meet the targets of 6g a day for adults. Children’s intakes should be lower.

The categories have been changed:

- one additional category has been added on meat extracts
- sub-category on salted butter was removed where industry has already met the target
- minor changes were made to reflect current market position
- four categories have been removed in total

View Salt targets as Excel (66.5 KB)

In Northern Ireland, we aim to raise public awareness of salt. We want everyone to make informed choices based on clear and factual information. This includes front of pack nutrition labelling and education.

Salt intake research

In 2015, the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) looked at salt (sodium) intake in adults living in Northern Ireland and aged 19-64. The research was titled ‘Assessment of dietary sodium in Adults (19 to 64 years old) in Northern Ireland’. 
Collecting urine samples taken over a prolonged period of time is the best method for measuring salt intake, instead of a food diary or blood samples.

Salt Intake - research findings

- In 2015 the average salt intake for adults aged 19 to 64 years in Northern Ireland was 8.6g/day (10g per day for men and 7g per day for women).
- There was no statistically significant difference between the salt intake for adults in Northern Ireland compared to England.
- Salt intake was significantly higher for adults in Northern Ireland than in Scotland.
- Salt intake for men in Northern Ireland was significantly higher than that for men in both England and Scotland.