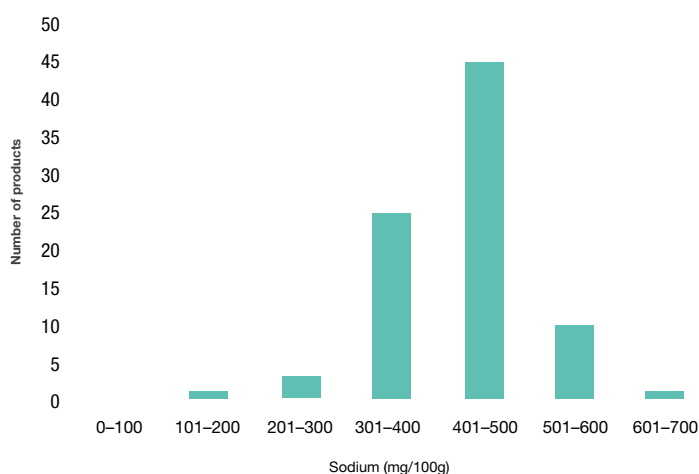


Industry salt reduction targets

WHAT IS IT?

- Targets allow for gradual salt reduction in packaged food products over time, often aiming for an average reduction of ~20 – 25% in salt content over 5 years, to start.
- Salt reduction targets can be mandatory (preferred) or voluntary, and should include public monitoring and a clear plan with interim goals.
- Effective targets are set for specific food categories (e.g. bread) and take into account functional aspects of the salt content of foods and the flavor profile.
- Targets can be a maximum threshold or the average salt content of products in a category, ideally weighted by sales.

SALT CONTENT CAN VARY WIDELY AMONG SIMILAR FOODS



RATIONALE

- In most countries, including low- and middle-income countries, packaged foods account for a large and growing proportion of salt intake
- Among similar foods, there is often wide variation in salt content across products, indicating that salt reduction is feasible without sacrificing consumer acceptance
- Reducing the salt content of packaged food changes the food environment without requiring consumer action, making the healthy choice the default
- It creates choice as consumers are able to add salt back on their own, if desired

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

1. Set Goals and Timeline
 - Assess processed food contribution to salt intake to determine percentage reduction goal
 - Build database of processed foods to understand and monitor food supply
 - Establish monitoring schedule to assess progress
 - Commit to publicly reporting on changes
2. Build Database and Develop Food Categories
 - Use database to define categories, set targets, engage with industry, and monitor progress
 - Organize products in database by food category
 - Comprehensive initiatives (e.g. UK) can include over 60 food categories; however, if there are a few key categories that make up a large proportion of sodium intake, it may be easier to focus on these at the beginning
3. Set and Refine Salt Targets
 - Use targets from other countries as a reference
 - Consider mean and range of salt within category; assess market feasibility
 - Consider product varieties within the category and functional properties of salt
4. Engage Industry
 - Make national commitment to salt reduction
 - Reach out to food associations and processed food companies
 - Use detailed food category analysis to demonstrate opportunities for reduction
 - Create transparent, structured process to engage industry; solicit feedback and commitments
5. Publicly monitor progress to targets
 - Update database in target years
 - Analyze by category and by company
 - Publicly announce progress, including outreach to the media

WHAT IS NEEDED

- Government leadership with commitment to support a monitoring system
- Advocacy and support by civil society, researchers, and scientific associations to encourage industry to participate, ensure support across government, and counter potential backlash from vested interests
- Staff to coordinate the project, build and maintain a database, set targets and lead outreach to industry associations and food manufacturers
- A packaged food database to inform the development of targets and monitor progress
- Technical assistance on the functional roles of sodium in each food category to help set targets and address industry concerns

WHERE HAS THIS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

- The UK government led a successful voluntary program; targets were first set in 2005 and salt intake, as measured by urinary excretion, decreased by approximately 15% over 7 years.⁵ A detailed nutrition database and consistent monitoring were crucial to success.
- Following the UK model, New York City developed voluntary targets as part of the National Salt Reduction Initiative in 2009. As with most voluntary targets, New York involved industry by requesting feedback during the target-setting process and encouraging industry commitments. Progress and industry commitments were monitored and publicly reported, with a clear framework for making decisions if targets were not met by the end date. In New York, reductions in the sales-weighted mean salt density of 7% were reported in packaged food over 5 years.⁶
- Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Mauritius, Netherlands, Paraguay, Portugal, Slovak Republic and South Africa have all set mandatory maximum levels of salt in at least one food category, often bread.⁷ Argentina's and South Africa's regulations are the most extensive, with 18 and 13 categories, respectively.
- Argentina's approach includes both mandatory targets for packaged food and voluntary targets for local producers, such as small bakeries. Most packaged foods met the mandatory salt targets and there was a reduction of 18% in the salt content of bread between 2009 and 2010.⁸ Penalties were established for companies if mandatory requirements were not met.
- In Kuwait, the largest manufacturer of bread, responsible for 80% of the market, reduced the salt content of bread by 20%.⁹