

# Exploring public understanding of salt and sodium labelling

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This research explores the UK public's understanding and preference of the terms salt and sodium, with a particular focus on food labels.

## Background and methods

Contractor: the peoplepartnership

The FSA commissioned this qualitative research to help inform the UK position and feed into international discussions on labelling of salt and sodium information on food. The research explored the UK public's comprehension of the terms 'sodium' and 'salt', and their preferences for how best to express this information.

The research used a combination of group discussions and in-depth interviews. Twelve group discussions, each comprising six participants, were conducted among a cross-section of the adult general public. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with people attempting to reduce their salt or sodium consumption, or that of someone in their household. These people were included to explore the views of those most likely to need and use information on salt and sodium.

## Key findings

Public understanding of the terms 'salt' and 'sodium':

- Awareness and understanding of salt was much more developed among participants than awareness and understanding of sodium, and there was confusion regarding the relationship between salt and sodium.
- Although awareness of the sources of food in which salt can be found was incomplete; this was much better understood than the sources of sodium.
- Despite a general understanding of the health consequences of eating too much salt, there was only limited awareness among participants that sodium is the component of salt that is damaging to health.

Public views on current salt/sodium labelling and supporting information and preferences for this information:

- There was an overall desire for labelling to show information on salt/sodium content as consistently, clearly, prominently and unambiguously as possible.
- There was a strong overall preference for the use of the term 'salt' rather than the term 'sodium' on labelling information.
- There were also participants, more typically people attempting to reduce their/someone in their households' salt or sodium consumption, and most interested in salt/sodium, who initially preferred the focus of food labelling to be on sodium. However, on further reflection, these participants felt it may be better to focus on salt to prevent confusion, but with additional information about the relationship between salt and sodium, on the back of pack, to use when they wanted.
- Of the conventions looked at in the research as to how to express the relationship between salt and sodium, 'salt, of which sodium' was consistently preferred. This

convention was thought to highlight the key nutritional issue that consumers are aware of and looking out for (that is, salt); visually communicate the nature of the relationship between salt and sodium (that sodium is a constituent part of salt); and reflect the approach taken to the labelling of fats and carbohydrates. Given that this convention is not technically correct, this format would have to be redeveloped if it were to be considered for use on food labelling.

- Participants in the study felt that it was particularly important that any communications about salt and sodium have synergy with the way in which products are labelled, to support consumers in making informed choices.

## Related links

[Executive summary: qualitative research on salt and sodium labelling](#)

 (pdf 476KB)

[Qualitative research to explore public understanding of sodium and salt labelling](#) Read the research in full

 (pdf 2MB)

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/socsci/surveys/saltsodium>

# Agency welcomes healthy pub progress

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The Agency today welcomes progress made by companies representing more than five thousand UK pubs to help their customers make healthier choices.

The chains: Whitbread, Punch Pub Company, Marston's Inns and Taverns, Greene King and JD Wetherspoon, all made their first commitments to healthy eating in February 2009 and were asked by the Agency to review and extend them each year.

The first review is now complete. Progress highlighted supports the Agency's priorities to reduce salt and saturated fat, providing healthier choices and more information for their customers.

Examples include:

- Salt levels have been reduced by all the pub chains, with many products now meeting FSA 2010/2012 targets.
- All companies are working to reduce saturated fat levels in their products; for example by changing the ingredients and recipes and using healthier cooking techniques such as rotisserie cooking.

- Companies are looking to provide portions which meet their customers' needs; for example ensuring the portion sizes and nutritional content of their children's menus are appropriate and offering more choice, such as 'light bites', for adults.

Each company has now set itself further targets for the forthcoming year.

Clair Baynton, Head of Nutrition at the FSA, says: 'It's very encouraging to see so many parts of the UK pub industry making such good progress in providing healthier food choices to their customers. Eating out is nowadays a regular part of most people's lives so it's important that healthy options should be available whenever possible.'

'The Agency looks forward to seeing these companies continue to make further progress.'

The Agency is currently working with 44 companies, each of which has produced a commitment document that is available via the link below.

The documents set out actions the companies have carried out, or are planning, towards healthier catering. These cover procurement, menu planning, kitchen practice and consumer information. The commitment work covers the breadth of the catering sector and includes workplace caterers, foodservice suppliers, pubs, coffee and sandwich shop, and restaurants chains.

## **Related links**

[Healthy catering commitments](#) Read the commitments made by caterers

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2010/mar/pubprogress>