

FACTSHEET No. 21

SALT IN BREAD

Background

Salt (sodium chloride) is an essential ingredient in bread.

Salt plays a major role in dough formation, fermentation rate, flavour and eating properties of bread.

The UK government has set a target of reducing the average salt consumption for adults to 6g a day. It has also set levels for children.

Medical evidence shows that too much salt (sodium) in the diet can contribute to high blood pressure and has been linked to an increased risk of other diseases.

Since the mid-1980s, the baking industry has been actively reducing salt in bread and working closely with the government, has made significant strides to meet the agreed Government targets for foods. Salt in bread has been reducing since the mid '80s. Since formal targets were agreed in 2005 salt in bread has been reduced by 27% to a level of less than 1g of salt per 100g of bread.

Federation of Bakers' members have implemented salt reductions to meet the Department of Health's 2012 target of 0.40g per 100g (1g salt) of bread. Since then discussions have taken place regarding the 2017 targets which require a 10% reduction on the 2012 target. Further reductions are very challenging for the bread industry as salt has a significant technological role in bread-making. However, bakers are committed to working with DH to continue to investigate ways of reducing salt where it is technically feasible to do so.

The UK has one of the lowest levels of salt in bread in the world.

Q&A's

What is the difference between sodium and salt?

Salt is known chemically as sodium chloride. Salt is legally required to be listed in the nutrition panel under the Food Information to Consumers Regulation. The sodium

figure can be calculated by dividing the salt value by 2.5 so if a food contains 1.0g sodium then it contains $1.0 / 2.5 = 0.4$ g sodium.

Why does the body need salt?

It is the sodium in salt that is an essential mineral; required in small quantities for the operation of certain functions in the body.

Sodium is required in order to perform a variety of essential functions. It helps maintain the fluid in our blood cells and is used to transmit information in our nerves and muscles. It is also used in the uptake of certain nutrients from our small intestines. The body cannot make sodium and so we are reliant on food to ensure that we get the required intake.

Medical evidence shows that too much sodium in the diet can contribute to high blood pressure and has been linked to increased risk of other diseases.

Why does bread contain salt?

Salt is an essential ingredient in bread. It contributes to the taste and it controls fermentation, a key part of the bread making process.

Why don't you take salt out of bread altogether?

Salt is needed in bread making because it helps improve product texture, adds flavour and helps enhance its keeping qualities. Without salt bread rises faster and air pockets enlarge where the gluten has broken allowing holes to form. It is much harder to work with very low salt levels when you are producing a large number of loaves as opposed to making 1 or 2 loaves at home. Bread made without salt will also taste bland and have a less appealing texture. Lower salt levels will also increase the rate at which bread stales.

How will I know how much salt is in the bread that I buy?

The bread that FOB members produce is wrapped and the salt content is clearly labelled on the pack.

Does unwrapped bread from a local baker contain salt?

Bread from a local baker will typically contain salt. Most of this bread will be unwrapped and therefore will not have a label. How much salt there may be in the bread will not therefore be declared and there is no legal requirement for the baker to have this information available.

How much salt does bread contribute to the diet?

A survey of 44,000 foodstuffs, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in March 2011¹ suggests that bread and bakery products contribute 13% of dietary salt intake in the UK. According to the survey, bread alone contributes a little under 10%.

¹ Sodium content of processed foods in the United Kingdom: analysis of 44,000 foods purchased by 21,000 households. Cliona Ni Mhurchu et al, American Journal of Clinical Nutrition March 2011 (published online 29/12/2010).