**The Role of Bread in the UK Diet Explored in BNF Review**

* Bread is one of the nation’s favourite staple foods, with 96% of UK consumers reporting that they have purchased bread in the past month (Mintel 2019).
* Bread is pictured within the starchy carbohydrate food group of UK government’s Eatwell Guide, with advice to choose higher fibre wholegrain varieties where possible.
* Bread provides 16-20% of carbohydrate intake (mainly starch) across all age groups and 10-12% of protein intake.
* Bread contributes 17-21% of dietary fibre across all age groups. The most recent NDNS\* survey indicated that UK intake of fibre is falling below the recommended amounts. Wholemeal bread is a good source of fibre, but all bread, including white, provides fibre.
* Bread contributes 12-17% of our intake of calcium in the UK, with white bread providing a significant 8-12% of calcium across all age groups.
* It provides 9-14% of our dietary intake of folate – a vitamin the recent NDNS report revealed there is evidence of low blood concentrations of, amongst some teenage girls and female adults.
* Bread provides 15-17% of the population’s dietary intake of iron across different age groups. On average, 54% of adolescent girls and 27% of women in the UK have iron intakes below the lower reference nutrient intake[[1]](#footnote-1).

With demand for wrapped and sliced bread increasing during the current health crisis, at one point by as much as 50%, bread has proven itself to be one of the nation’s favourite staple foods and with good reason. An updated review launched this month (May 2020) by **the** **British Nutrition Foundation (BNF)** outlines the role bread (including white, wholemeal, brown and wheat germ) plays in the UK diet. Supported by **the Federation of Bakers,** the review\*\* considers the contribution of bread to nutrient intakes, the biological effects of different components of bread and the health claims related to these, as well as exploring future trends for bread.

To read the review in full, visit <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/nbu.12435>

**UK Bread industry overview 2020**

Approximately 5 million tonnes of wheat are milled each year in the UK, 85% of which is grown in the UK and 60% of the flour processed is used to manufacture bread products. In the UK, non-wholemeal wheat flour is fortified with calcium, iron, niacin and thiamin to replace nutrients lost during milling, under The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 (HM Government 1998).

As a household staple, bread remains an extremely popular choice with 96% of UK consumers reporting to have purchased bread in the past month (Mintel 2019). This is equivalent to nearly 11 million loaves sold each day or 60 loaves per person, per year.

The BNF review indicates that whilst overall, over the past 50 years bread sales have declined, sales of wholemeal, brown and other breads have all increased. Data from the latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)\*, indicates that white bread remains the most commonly consumed bread in the UK with 70-87% of all consumers, across all age groups consuming it. Outside of that, 20-38% eat wholemeal bread; 33-37% eat brown, granary and wheatgerm breads and 5-11% consume other breads respectively.

The types of bread available in the UK has increased significantly in recent years, as product development and innovative technology, combined with new ingredients has allowed the industry to cater for a market with changing dietary requirements and preferences, as well as reflecting a more diverse and nutritionally engaged UK population.

**Health & Nutrition**

The review highlights how bread offers a wide range of nutrients which are important for a healthy diet.

In the UK, bread is a significant contributor to UK carbohydrate intakes (mainly starch) providing 16-20% of intake across all age groups. Starchy foods are a good source of energy and provide a range of nutrients. The NHS website advises that they should make up just over a third of our diet [[2]](#footnote-2) and to choose higher fibre wholegrain varieties.

Bread also provides both other macro-nutrients\*\*\*. Bread is a source of protein and contributes 10-12% of our protein intake. It is also low in total and saturated fat and sugars (PHE 2019).

**Fibre**

As the review identifies, diets higher in fibre are associated with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer. The most recent NDNS survey indicated however, that UK intake of fibre is falling below the recommended amounts. Government guidelines say adult dietary fibre intake should be 30g a day, as part of a healthy balanced diet, but are only eating on average about 18g a day[[3]](#footnote-3).

All bread, including white, provides fibre. Wholemeal bread the second most popular bread in the UK, is high in fibre, with 100g providing 7g - 23% of the recommended adult daily intake of 30g (2015 government guidelines). White bread provides 2.9 g of fibre per 100 g, just below the threshold to qualify as a source using UK and EU nutrition claim regulatory criteria. Across all types, bread contributes **17-21% of dietary fibre across all age groups.**

**Vitamins and Micronutrients**

Bread provides a number of vitamins and micronutrients. White bread is **a source of calcium, manganese, thiamin (vitamin B1) and niacin (vitamin B3)** and wholemeal bread is **high in manganese and niacin and a source of magnesium, phosphorus, iron, copper, zinc, thiamin and folate**. White bread tends to provide significantly more of some of these micronutrients as it is generally eaten in larger quantities.

Bread contributes **12-17% of our intake of calcium in the UK**, with white bread contributing a significant 8-12% of calcium across all age groups. According to the NDNS, calcium intakes are low in adolescent girls aged 11-18 years, yet calcium is particularly important during this time for the growth and development of normal bones and a low intake during this period may increase the risk of osteoporosis in later life[[4]](#footnote-4).

Bread provides **9-14% of our dietary intake of folate** and the most recent NDNS report revealed that there is evidence of low blood folate concentrations amongst some teenage girls and female adults. This is important as there is an increase in folate requirements during the early stages of pregnancy to prevent neural tube defects (NTD’s) in the developing baby. As bread is so widely consumed, it is a very effective vehicle for improving folic acid status and bread contributes to 11% of folate intake in women of child bearing age (NDNS).

On average, 54% of adolescent girls and 27% of women in the UK have iron intakes below the lower reference nutrient intake, suggesting inadequate intakes[[5]](#footnote-5). Furthermore, 9% of girls aged 11–18 years and 5% of women aged 19–64 years were classified as iron-deficient based on the WHO classification for iron deficiency and anaemia. Bread provides **15-17% of the population’s dietary intake of iron** across different age groups.

**In summary, across all age groups in the UK, bread on average contributes the below to our dietary intake of vitamins and minerals:**

* + **9-14% of folate**
  + **15-17% of iron**
  + **12-17% of calcium**
  + **12-13% of magnesium**
  + **10-11% of zinc**

**Salt (sodium)**

* Sodium is an essential nutrient and salt (sodium chloride) is the major source of sodium in the UK diet. Salt is an essential ingredient in bread, stabilising the fermentation rate during bread making, strengthening the dough and enhancing the flavour[[6]](#footnote-6). Therefore, all bread contains some salt and bread does contribute substantially to sodium intakes (16-19% across different age groups). However, the average salt content of bread is being reduced, and had dropped from 1.23g/100g in 2001 to 0.95g/100g in 2017. Work on reducing population salt intakes continues and the Department of Health and Social Care is due to publish revised salt targets in 2020 (DHSC 2019).

**Bioactives**

Whole wheat contains a variety of phytochemicals and evidence suggests that diets rich in phytochemicals (present in plant foods) may protect against the development of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. The concentration of these compounds varies by the variety of grain and growing conditions.Emerging research also suggests that consuming a diverse range of bioactives, from fruit and vegetables, pulses and whole grains may benefit the gut microbiome.

The review reaffirms bread’s place as one of the UK’s favourite staple food items, and its contribution to fibre and micronutrient intake. As **Gordon Polson, Chief Executive of the Federation of Bakers, says;** *“This BNF review is an excellent reminder of the value of bread to the UK diet. It’s vital that we educate everyone about the range of nutrients all bread delivers – from protein and fibre to vitamins and minerals. Providing so much more than just energy, bread has something to offer almost everyone – which is why it has held a special place in the diet of the nation for many years. As an industry by continuing to adapt to consumer tastes and trends and taking advantage of new technology, we will continue to provide these important nutrients, long into the future.”*

Ends

**Notes to Editors:**

For further information please contact Cat Cambridge at the Federation of Bakers Press Office on 07919 217 443 or email: [fob@ceres-pr.co.uk](mailto:fob@ceres-pr.co.uk)

**About the Federation of Bakers:**

The Federation of Bakers Ltd represents the interests of the UK’s largest baking companies who manufacture sliced and wrapped bread, bakery snacks and other bread products.

The Federation of Bakers members include: Allied Bakeries Limited, Délifrance, Fine Lady Bakeries Limited, Geary’s Bakeries Limited, Jackson’s Bakery Limited, Kerry Ingredients & Flavours, Roberts Bakery, Warburtons Limited and WD Irwin and Sons Limited.

\*The National Diet and Nutrition Survey is a programme that collects detailed, quantitative information on the food consumption, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the UK general population.

\*\*The new report is an update to a previous BNF review on bread from 2012.

\*\*\***Table Showing average macronutrient composition of UK white and wholemeal breads**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Source: McCance and Widdowson’s Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset (PHE 2019) per 100g** | **White bread** | **Wholemeal bread** |
| **Energy (kcal)** | 236 | 217 |
| **Carbohydrate (g)** | 48.7 | 42.0 |
| **Starch (g)** | 45.8 | 39.3 |
| **Total sugars (g)** | 3.0 | 2.8 |
| **Fibre (g)** | 2.9 | 7.0 |
| **Protein (g)** | 8.7 | 9.4 |
| **Total fat (g)** | 2.1 | 2.5 |
| **Saturated fat (g)** | 0.40\* | 0.46 |

1. Roberts et al. 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-get-more-fibre-into-your-diet/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beto 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Roberts et al. 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Miller & Hoseney 2008; Belz et al. 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)