

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.

FOB has for many years taken a positive and proactive approach to salt reduction and has worked closely with government - DHSC and before that FSA - on its salt reduction campaigns under the Responsibility Deal which set a 2012 target of 400mg per 100g of bread (1g salt) and a further 10% reduction for 2017. The latest targets announced by PHE calling for further reductions to be achieved by 2024 will present key technical challenges for the industry as salt is an essential ingredient and plays a key role in the bread making process and has an impact on bread shelf life.

FOB members have been very successful in reducing the amount of salt in bread, over the past 10 years we have achieved up to 30% reduction to a level of less than 1g of salt per 100g of bread. Our latest industry data has shown an average level of 388mg of sodium (0.97g salt) per 100g of bread. This is less than 1%. 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 Government to continue to investigate ways of reducing salt where it is technically feasible to do so.

It is worth noting that the UK has one of the lowest levels of salt in bread in the world. In Europe only 4 member states out of 19 have to date implemented national salt legislation with levels ranging from 1.1 – 2g salt per 100g of bread.¹

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

¹ Source: AIBI

figure can be calculated by dividing the salt value by 2.5 so if a food contains 1.0g sodium then it contains $1.0 / 2.5 = 0.4\text{g}$ 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 2011² suggests that bread and bakery products contribute 13% of dietary salt intake in the UK. According to the survey, bread contributes a little under 10%.

² Sodium content of processed foods in the UK: 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).