

Media Release

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Aussie kids' favourite sandwich fillings hide excessive salt, Heart Foundation figures show

New Heart Foundation figures show that typical “go-to” school lunchbox options such as the humble ham and cheese sandwich can deliver schoolkids more than half their entire recommended daily allowance of salt. A typical ham and cheese sandwich could deliver almost an entire day’s worth of salt for school children aged four-to-eightⁱ.

Dietitians at the Heart Foundation have analysed the average salt contentⁱⁱ of a range of go-to school lunchbox options and found that:

- A ham and cheese sandwich on white bread with butter can contain 3g of salt. This is 91% of a four-to-eight year old’s recommended daily allowance of 3.5g of salt and well over half (61%) of a 9-13 year old’s recommended daily allowance.ⁱⁱⁱ
- A cheese and vegemite sandwich on white bread with butter can contain 2g of salt. This is over half (57%) of a four-to-eight year old’s recommended daily allowance and 40% of the daily allowance for a 9-13 year old.
- A chicken loaf and cheese sandwich on white bread with mayonnaise can contain 2.8g of salt. This is 80% of a four-to-eight year old’s recommended daily allowance of 3.5g and more than half of it for a 9-13 year old.

Heart Foundation Victoria CEO Kellie-Ann Jolly said parents needed to be aware that the fillings they put in sandwiches could contribute more salt than they realise to their children’s diets. But this didn’t mean they should cut out sandwiches as a lunchbox staple.

“There are many other healthy, low salt sandwich filling options,” Ms Jolly said. “Why not try roasted chicken and avocado on multigrain bread? Or an egg and avocado sandwich? Both contain less than a gram of salt. Or a cheese and carrot sandwich on multigrain, which contains only 1.4 grams of salt.”

Recent research^{iv} shows that two out of three Victorian schoolchildren are consuming 60 per cent more salt than is recommended every day, and more than half of that comes from “core” food groups, such as bread and cheese and breakfast cereals.

Heart Foundation Victoria dietitian Sian Armstrong said the amount of salt in some core foods like bread and cheese was concerning, but the Heart Foundation did not recommend cutting them out altogether.

“Bread and cheese contribute to the basis of a healthy balanced diet so it’s important to read the label and choose the lowest salt option or look for products labelled ‘low salt’ or ‘salt reduced’,” Ms Armstrong said.

“It’s also important to think about the whole lunchbox. An ideal healthy lunchbox would include a filling lunch such as a wholegrain sandwich with protein such as chicken or eggs. The snacks could be fresh fruit, chopped vegetables, and yoghurt,” Ms Armstrong said.

“You can find lots of ideas for healthy and filling snacks, and learn how to read food labels at the Unpack the Salt website.”

Ms Jolly added that reducing the amount of salt in children’s diets was critical to protecting the heart health of future generations.

“There is a link between a high salt diet and high blood pressure in adulthood. Meanwhile, studies have shown that reducing salt intake during childhood lowers blood pressure. This is important, because blood pressure tracks over the life course, meaning higher levels in childhood increase the future risk of high blood pressure as an adult. Hence salt reduction strategies that seek to protect childhood blood pressure are important for longer- term prevention of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease.”

VicHealth dietitian Jenny Reimers said the alarming levels of hidden salt in packaged foods had prompted the Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership to launch Unpack the Salt: “It’s critical we raise awareness of the dangers of hidden salt in packaged foods to help consumers make healthy choices for their families,” Ms Reimers said.

“We know parents want their kids to be healthy which is why it’s so important that the food industry start reformulating their products to contain less salt.”

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About the Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership

The Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership was established in 2014 in response to alarming high levels of salt consumption by the Victorian public. The partnership comprises of peak public health organisations: VicHealth, Heart Foundation (Victoria), The George Institute for Global Health, Deakin University Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), National Stroke Foundation, Kidney Health Australia, The Victorian Department for Health and Human Services, Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute and the High Blood Pressure Research Council. Australia is committed to meeting the World Health Organization’s target of 30 percent reduction in average population salt intake by 2025. To achieve this, the partnership has developed a comprehensive set of actions aimed at gaining consensus and commitment for salt reduction action from governments, public and industry in Victoria.

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- ⁱ The [NHMRC Upper Level](#) for sodium is 1400mg (3.5g salt) for 4-8 year old's
- ⁱⁱ All sodium/salt values are sourced from FoodWorks 8 food composition database
- ⁱⁱⁱ The [NHMRC Upper Level](#) for sodium is 2000mg (5g salt) for 9-13 year old's.
- ^{iv} Grimes CA, Riddell LJ, Campbell KJ, et al. Dietary intake and sources of sodium and potassium among Australian schoolchildren: results from the cross-sectional Salt and Other Nutrients in Children (SONIC) study. *BMJ Open* 2017; 7:e016639. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016639