

Media release
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Victorians urged to curb their consumption of salt

A new study revealing the hidden salt content in some of Australia's most popular bread products has prompted a call urging Victorians to curb their enthusiasm when it comes to processed foods concealing high levels of salt.

In an analysis of close to 1,500 bread products from 2010-2017, researchers from The George Institute for Global Health found some loaves contained more than a third of the daily recommended salt intake in just two slices.

The results, released during World Salt Awareness Week (20 – 26 March 2017), act as a reminder to Victorians to be mindful of the amount of salt they're consuming through processed and packaged foods populating our pantries and supermarket shelves.

Heart Foundation CEO Kellie-Ann Jolly said Victorian adults are consuming almost twice the recommended levels of salt, leading to an increased risk of high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease including heart attack, stroke, and blood vessel disease.

"More than one in three adults in Victoria, or around 1.5 million people, have high blood pressure – a major contributor to heart disease – Victoria's leading cause of death.

"The level of salt in processed foods is the greatest culprit when it comes to our salt consumption. In fact, 75 per cent our salt intake comes from the processed foods we eat every day, like some breads, processed meats, cheeses, sauces and spreads."

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said Victorians need to eat 6,000 tonnes less salt each year to meet the World Health Organization's target of reducing salt intake by 30 per cent by 2025.

"Reducing Victoria's salt intake by 30 per cent would save hundreds of lives each year and close to \$50 million in healthcare costs.

"Salt is responsible for six times more deaths in Victoria than the annual road toll. Eating less salt is an effective way to prevent high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes."

Mum of four, Rachael Smith, follows a low-salt diet to help control her high blood pressure and said limiting the amount of salt in her family's diet had become one of her biggest priorities following her husband's survival of two heart attacks.

"Reducing the amount of salt in my family's diet has become very important to all of us but it's also been a challenge.

"The struggle to find lower salt products in the supermarket has actually encouraged me to go back to basics in the kitchen by using a lot of fresh foods," she said.

“I’ve often found it mind boggling to realise how much salt is hidden in the foods that are unsuspecting, such as sweet foods, and it can get confusing and even daunting when you begin looking at food labels and notice the amounts and variations of added salt.”

Ms Jolly said the simplest way to avoid consuming too much salt in our diet is through limiting processed foods, and essential to this aim, is the ability to understand salt and sodium content on food labels.

“When you’re looking at the sodium content on food labels, look for foods with less than 400mg of sodium. The best choices are those with less than 120mg of sodium per 100g. “

“There are also a number of tools available to help people make healthier, lower-salt choices, such as the FoodSwitch App and the Heart Foundation’s new [sodium and salt converter](#). Visit the [Don’t Trust Your Tastebuds](#) website for more information on salt in the food supply,” Ms Jolly said.

Ms Rechter said the Victorian Salt Reduction Partnership, comprised of peak public health organisations, aimed to strengthen health policies and partnerships to reduce the amount of salt in processed food.

“The Partnership is working toward raising awareness of the ways in which people can reduce their salt intake, as well as working with industry and government to develop the availability of lower salt options.”

The Victorian Salt Reduction partnership is made up of VicHealth, The Heart Foundation, The George Institute, Stroke Foundation, Kidney Health Australia, Deakin University and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.

Salty facts:

- The average Victorian adult eats around 8-10 grams of salt each day, almost double the World Health Organization recommendation of less than 5 grams or one teaspoon per day.
- Victorian children consume around 30 per cent more than the recommended daily salt limit.
- Reducing the average daily salt intake in Victoria by around half a teaspoon (3grams) could achieve the potential cost saving of \$47.4 million per year in health care costs alone.
- Salt reduction in Victoria could save up to 800 Victorian lives a year from stroke and heart disease.
- In Victoria, the number of deaths attributable to a high salt intake is around six times the annual road toll.

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