

Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health

Nutrition Research in Action

SHAKE THE SALT HABIT

LESS SALT

LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

LESS RISK OF STROKE AND HEART DISEASE

THE FOOD INDUSTRY holds the key to better health. Three quarters of the salt we eat each day is already in the food we buy.

WILL YOU JOIN US IN ASKING THEM TO SHAKE THE SALT HABIT?

The infographic features three overlapping circles. The top-right circle is red and contains various food items like cereal, crisps, soup, and a pizza. The bottom-left circle is yellow and shows a family of three with a blood pressure monitor. The bottom-right circle is green and shows a silhouette of a head with a brain and a heart. Arrows point from the food circle to the blood pressure circle, and from the blood pressure circle to the health risks circle.

Annual Report

May 2021 – April 2022



Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (CASSH) is a registered charity dedicated to reducing dietary salt, sugar and calorie consumption to improve the health of populations in the UK and worldwide.

The charity is formed of three research and advocacy groups: **Action on Salt, Action on Sugar** and **World Action on Salt, Sugar & Health (WASSH)**.



Action on Salt is successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high salt diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of salt in processed foods as well as salt added to cooking, and the table. To date, many supermarkets and food manufacturers have chosen to adopt a policy of gradually reducing the salt content of their products.

Action on Salt is supported by 21 expert scientific members.



Action on Sugar is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high sugar diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugars in food and drink products. By working to reach a consensus with food manufacturers and Government that there is strong evidence that free sugars are a major risk factor for obesity and have other adverse health effects, we aim to create sustainable policies and systems that enable reduced free sugars intake.

Action on Sugar is supported by 23 expert advisors.



WASSH's mission is to improve the health of populations throughout the world by achieving reductions in salt, sugar and calorie intake. WASSH provides resources and expert advice to enable the development and implementation of salt, sugar and calorie reduction programmes worldwide.

WASSH has a global network of more than 600 expert members in 100 countries.

CASSH Team

Prof Graham MacGregor	Trustee, Chairman, CASSH
Katharine Jenner RNutr	Director, CASSH
Dr Kawther Hashem RNutr	Campaign Lead and Research Fellow, Action on Sugar (maternity leave)
Sonia Pombo	Campaign Manager, Action on Salt
Mhairi Brown RNutr	Policy & Public Affairs Manager, Action on Salt & Action on Sugar / Programme Manager, WASSH
Holly Gabriel RNutr	Nutrition Manager, Action on Sugar
Zoe Davies ANutr	Nutritionist, Action on Salt and Action on Sugar (maternity leave)
Sheena Bhageerutty ANutr	Assistant Nutritionist, Action on Salt and Action on Sugar
Harriet Burt ANutr	Policy and Communications Officer, WASSH

Action on Salt Members

Trustee	Prof PS Sever	Member	Prof KT Khaw
Trustee	Prof MR Law	Member	Prof T Lang
Trustee	Prof F He	Member	Prof MEJ Lean
Member	Prof G Beevers	Member	Prof Sir M Marmot
Member	Prof S Capewell	Member	Prof K McPherson
Member	Prof FP Cappuccio	Member	Prof C Millett
Member	Prof PM Dodson	Member	Prof NP Poulter
Member	Prof P Elliott	Member	Dr W Sunman
Member	Prof J George	Member	Prof Sir N Wald
Member	Prof WPT James	Member	Prof J Winkler
Member	Mr M Kane		

Action on Sugar Advisors

Advisor	Prof S Capewell	Advisor	Prof C Millett
Advisor	Prof J Cuzick	Advisor	Ms M Mwatsama
Advisor	Mr T Fry	Advisor	Dr M Rayner
Advisor	Prof A Garde	Advisor	Mr N Rigby
Advisor	Prof P James	Advisor	Prof A Rugg-Gunn
Advisor	Prof RJ Johnson	Advisor	Prof Sir N Wald
Advisor	Mr M Kane	Advisor	Prof J Wass
Advisor	Prof T Lang	Advisor	Prof P Whincup
Advisor	Dr C Llewellyn	Advisor	Prof J Winkler
Advisor	Prof R Lustig		

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Welcome

The year began on a high, with the Queen's Speech reaffirming the government's commitment to obesity prevention. Mandatory calorie labelling in the out of home sector, and restrictions on the advertising and promotion of less healthy food were all highlighted as legislative priorities.

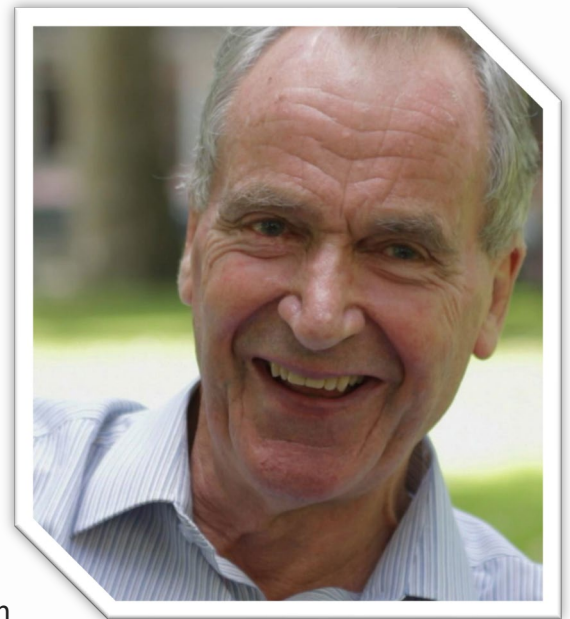
We were pleased to see this commitment followed through, with mandatory calorie labelling implemented as promised. This represents a positive step forward in ensuring that the sector becomes more transparent about what they put in our food and drinks; but it is just the first step. CASSH have long supported transparent nutrition labelling, and we hope that the government's current commitment to health will ensure that full nutrition labelling in the out of home sector will not be too far behind.

The National Food Strategy maintained momentum, launching in July with a somewhat unexpected – but very much welcome - recommendation of a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax. The fact that an independent review of England's food system highlighted the need for more progress in salt and sugar reduction makes it abundantly clear that the value of reformulation is being recognised far and wide. The report also highlighted what we've said for many years: voluntary reformulation is not working and we are certain that if the final report on progress made under the Sugar Reduction Programme had been released as promised this year, it would have added to this narrative. It is time for mandatory measures and incentives, and we look forward to the government's response to these proposals.

We do end the year with some concerns that Boris Johnson may be considering rolling back policies, as support for his leadership crumbles. Taking into account the considerable effort that many food companies have already made to prepare for the implementation of these policies, no one would benefit from broken promises now, least of all public health. For now, we will remain hopeful that this is merely a rumour, and trust that the government will continue to do what is best for the health of the nation, the economy and the NHS.



Professor Graham MacGregor CBE
Chairman of CASSH



Our Year in Numbers

6

Surveys of the salt, sugar and excess calorie content of popular food

303

Pieces of media coverage, across TV, radio, print media and online

7

Submissions to government consultations

2

international awareness weeks

with support from 30 health charities

and 20+ countries

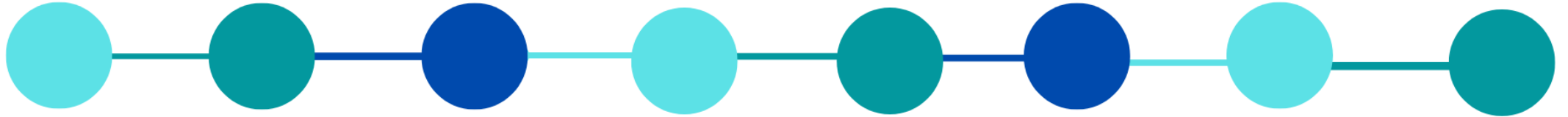
15

Meetings with food companies to challenge their progress with salt and sugar reduction

18

Peer reviewed publications

MAY 2021 JUN 2021 JUL 2021 SEPT 2021 OCT 2021 JAN 2022 FEB 2022 MAR 2022



The **2021 Queen's Speech** affirms the government's commitment to obesity prevention policies, including promotion and advertising restrictions

Mandatory calorie labelling for all out-of-home sector businesses with 250+ employees

World Health Organization releases **Global Sodium Benchmarks**

Department of Health and Social Care publish **regulations to introduce a 9pm watershed** for advertisements of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, alongside a **total online ban**

The **National Food Strategy** is published, with several recommendations including a **Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax**

The government release their updated **Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services**

The Food Standards Agency release their **Food and You 2 survey**, with sugar content a leading food concern for survey participants

Obesity Health Alliance publish **Turning the Tide: A 10-year Healthy Weight Strategy**

Public Health England release the results of their follow-up study of the **National Diet and Nutrition Survey**

Department of Health and Social Care announce that the UK will lead a new **WHO Sugar and Calorie Reduction Network**

US Food and Drug Administration release long-awaited salt reduction targets, first proposed in 2016

Office for Health Improvement and Disparities is launched

New research reveals the impact of **mandatory salt reduction targets in South Africa**, with a fall in population salt intake of 1.2g per day over just 4.5 years

Rumours emerge that **Boris Johnson is considering delaying or even scrapping policies** such as restrictions on price promotions of less healthy food and drinks

We launch a social media campaign, write letters and briefings for key decision makers

Government launch a **Levelling Up White Paper** which commits to taking forward several National Food Strategy Recommendations

During **Salt Awareness Week 2022**, we call for mandatory salt targets and coordinate a letter regarding this to Boris Johnson, **signed by health professionals, NGOs and health charities**

Policy and Public Affairs

May 2021: Queen's Speech Confirms Commitment to Public Health

The 2021 Queen's Speech set out the government's policies and proposed legislative programme for the new parliamentary session. As part of the speech, the Queen stated that the health and Care Bill would ban junk food adverts pre-9pm watershed on TV and a total ban online, restrict promotions on high fat, salt and sugar food and drinks in retailers from April 2022, and highlighted the introduction of mandatory calorie labelling in large out-of-home sector businesses with 250 or more employees.

Mhairi said: *"The Queen's words were slightly unexpected for those working tirelessly to prevent ill health... But anyone with experience of policymaking knows that it's not over until it's over – it is more important than ever for the Government to stand strong and get these policies over the line as promised."*

We were also pleased to see leadership from the World Health Organization, who released Global Sodium Benchmarks in May. The Benchmarks set out maximum levels of sodium that processed food should contain for more than 60 food categories. Global Benchmarks will help countries to set national policies and act as a dialogue between the WHO and the private food sector.

June 2021: Advertising Rules

The Department of Health and Social Care published the regulations which will come into force in 2022, to introduce the 9pm watershed for advertisements of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, alongside a total online ban.

Graham said: *"Whilst this is not a total ban on unhealthy food and drink advertising, the fact that meals high in salt, fat and sugar which are served by large fast food chains will be included in the restrictions is hugely significant. This is especially pertinent given many big food chains have been profiting enormously from advertising during the pandemic."*

July 2021: National Food Strategy

July saw the launch of the landmark National Food Strategy, an independent review of the UK's food system. The strategy highlighted that historic reform to the food system is needed to protect the NHS, improve the health of the nation and save our environment. Several recommendations were included, including a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax which would incentivise manufacturers to use less sugar and salt in their products.

Kawther said: *"Without doubt, a landmark Sugar Reformulation Tax would fix the current issues seen with the voluntary sugar reduction programme. The last progress report showed how far we are from meeting the 20% reduction with only a minuscule 3% reduction."*

The government released their updated Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services. These standards apply to all central government departments in England, prisons, the armed forces and the NHS. CASSH previously responded to the consultation on updating these standards in 2019 and we were pleased to see the government update the salt standards to reflect the 2024 salt reduction targets.

Hattie said: *"We welcome the updates to the GBSF and hope that the updated guidelines will encourage food and beverage manufactures, retailers and caterers in the public sector, and beyond, to reformulate their products with less salt and sugar."*

The Food Standards Agency also released the results of their Food and You 2 survey, which measures self-reported consumer knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to food safety and other food issues. The most common concern respondents had was the amount of sugar in food.

September 2021: Turning the Tide

In September, the Obesity Health Alliance, a coalition including Action on Sugar, the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Diabetes UK and medical royal colleges, released their Turning the Tide: A 10-year Healthy Weight Strategy. This report sets out a long-term agenda with 30 policy recommendations and calls on the government to take action to reverse the persistently high levels of excess weight in the population.

Katharine said: *“The health community have united to put forward a roadmap to help Boris make the easy choice, that is; to tackle the food systems that prevent us from leading healthier lives, rather than continuing to blame individuals who have little control of their food environment”*

Public Health England (PHE) released the results of their **follow-up study of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey rolling programme**, which aimed to describe and assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on diet and physical activity in the UK in 2020. Unsurprisingly, mean intakes of free sugars exceeded maximum recommendations in all age groups, while intakes of fruit, vegetables and fibre were below recommendations.

The Department of Health and Social Care announced that **the UK had been chosen to lead a new WHO Sugar and Calorie Reduction Network**, with over 50 countries being encouraged to sign up to the network which is set to launch in Spring 2022.

October 2021: US Salt Reduction Kickstarted

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released their long-awaited voluntary short term (2.5 year) salt reduction targets, first proposed in 2016 with input from WASSH. The targets apply to 163 categories of commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods, including breads, cheeses, sauces and toddler/baby food. Average salt intake in the U.S. is approximately 8.5 g/day; the FDA’s targets are intended to reduce average

salt intake to 7.5 g/day by encouraging food manufacturers, restaurants, and food service operations to gradually reduce salt in foods over time.

Public Health England’s replacement – **the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID)** – was launched. OHID is an office of the Department for Health and Social Care, but is jointly led by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Janelle de Gruchy and Director General for the Department of Health and Social Care Jonathan Marron, under the leadership of the Chief Medical Officer Prof Chris Whitty. We called on OHID to prioritise sugar reduction, particularly in products targeted at infants and young children, during our Sugar Awareness Week in November.

January 2022: Impact of South Africa’s mandatory salt targets

New research from North West University in South Africa highlighted the benefits of mandatory salt reduction targets in the country. The African-PREDICT study determined changes in average salt intake over a 4.5 year period (spanning a time before and after the targets were implemented), finding that there was a significant reduction in population salt intake of approximately 1.2g salt per day. The reduction was higher in black adults and low socio-economic groups, who are at high risk of developing high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

Graham said: *“Many thousands of lives in South Africa will now be saved from strokes and heart disease because of a simple piece of legislation forcing food manufacturers to put less salt in the food that they produce. It has taken the UK 20 years to see similar salt reductions from a voluntary approach, that South Africa has achieved in just few short years with a regulatory approach.”*

Also in January, the Department of Health and Social Care launched a **new ‘Better Health’ multimedia campaign**, to help families eat better supported by a NHS Food Scanner App. The app allows families to scan product barcodes from

their shop and the app will suggest healthier alternatives – similar to the FoodSwitch app.

February 2022: Policies Under Threat

In February, **rumours emerged** that Boris Johnson was considering rolling back on commitments to protect child health as his leadership came under scrutiny, specifically the proposed restrictions on price promotions for less healthy food and drinks. In response, CASSH conducted a **social media campaign** to highlight the range of products that could still be promoted even if restrictions were to be implemented. We also wrote a letter to Boris Johnson, highlighting the evidence in support of restrictions on promotions and co-signed a similar letter sent by the **Obesity Health Alliance**.

In light of the rumours, we developed briefings for members of the House of Lords to ensure they had

access to the necessary evidence as they debated the Health and Care Bill (which contained proposals to restrict price promotions).

The government also launched their **Levelling Up White Paper** in February, which sets out how they will spread opportunity more equally across the UK.

March 2022: Mandatory Salt Targets Now Needed

During our **2022 Salt Awareness Week campaign**, we called on the government to commit to mandatory salt reduction targets, to remedy the current poor progress with salt reduction in the UK. Our policy team also coordinated a letter to Boris Johnson to echo these calls, with signatures from more than 200 stakeholders.

Surveys

Over the last 12 months, we have worked on several surveys, some of which have been built into comprehensive technical reports to guide industry into further action.

Salt

January 2022: Chilled Sliced Meat



We revealed that two thirds of all chilled sliced meats including sliced ham, chicken, corned beef and salami sold by leading grocery retailers are dangerously high in salt, with one in three (35%) failing to meet the national salt reduction targets.

Food manufacturers in particular were reported to be lagging behind, with only one in three (37%) of their chilled sliced meat products achieving their respective salt targets, compared to two in three (69%) of retailer's own label products.

Mhairi says: "Voluntary salt reduction targets have been a key feature of public health policy in the UK for many years. After initial success, which inspired more than 50 countries to follow suit, progress has stagnated in the UK, whereas many other countries have gone further and introduced mandated targets. If the UK industry can no longer comply with voluntary measures, then now is the time for mandatory, comprehensive salt reduction targets to ensure success and create a level playing field."

Call to Action

Mandatory salt reduction targets for all products containing added salt to be enforced, with penalties for those food manufacturers who fail to comply.

Industry Comments

Tesco: *"The health of our customers is very important to us and we've worked hard to reduce salt across our own brand foods. At Tesco we have been reformulating our products for some time and we will continue to do so without compromising on taste or quality. Our reformulation plan looks at a wide variety of nutrients and ingredients important to supporting a healthy diet, including salt."*

M&S: *"At M&S, we know that our customers are looking for easy ways to make healthy food choices. We make healthy eating easier through provision of accessible customer information and clear on-pack labelling, including our Eat Well sunflower to signpost healthy choices. This is underpinned by a programme of reformulation to continually improve the nutritional profile of our foods by removing or reducing levels of unnecessary or unwanted ingredients such as saturated fat and salt."*

In January 2022, as part of the M&S salt reduction programme, we re-launched 7 products in the M&S British Outdoor Bred cooked sliced meat range achieving an 18% average salt reduction; these products now meet their respective 2024 salt targets set by the UK Department of Health. The reduction in salt was achieved through revising the recipe, whilst maintaining product quality and taste."

We are committed to delivering further salt reductions, not only in our M&S cooked sliced meat ranges, but across all our M&S food ranges to meet the UK Department of Health 2024 salt targets."

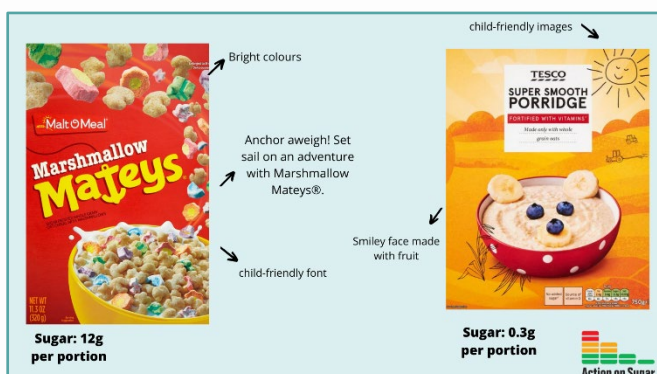
Lidl: *"Lidl are continuously reviewing the salt content of its cooked sliced meat to reduce the levels where possible, whilst ensuring the foods are of the highest quality, safe to consume, and with an appropriate shelf life. This category is very challenging to reduce salt given the preservative function it provides, and so a gradual reduction to align with technical developments is often necessary."*

Waitrose: *"We work closely with our suppliers to make continuous nutritional improvements to our products, including the significant reduction of salt across a number of categories, from breakfast cereals, ready meals and sandwiches. In terms of meats, our focus has been on nitrites and we were the first supermarket to reduce nitrites across our entire own-label bacon and gammon range, following a World Health Organisation (WHO) report which recommended limiting these in the diet. We know we have more to do on salt reduction in this area and are actively working to meet the 2024 targets set by Public Health England, making sure any changes do not compromise on taste or quality. Our products have traffic light labelling which is based on realistic portion sizes to allow our customers to make informed choices."*

Asda: *"Asda is committed to making healthier choices easier for our customers. Currently, almost 750 products carry our Live Better icon. This highlights the healthiest choices in our own-brand ranges, and we are aiming to increase that number to 1,200 by 2024. In 2019 we reduced salt from our chilled cooked meat ranges in line with government targets and we will continue to reformulate to improve the nutritional content of our products – without compromising quality, taste or food safety."*

Salt and Sugar

July 2021: Breakfast cereals with packaging that may appeal to children



We surveyed the nutritional content of breakfast cereals with child-friendly packaging as part of the Food Foundation's third annual **Broken Plate report**.

Our research found that 92% of cereals marketed towards children still contain high or medium levels of sugar, and more than 50% were medium or high in salt. More worryingly out of 162 cereals, only two would tick all the boxes for a healthy choice.

Call to Action

All cereal manufacturers to commit to removing child friendly images from the packaging of unhealthy products in a bid to tackle pester power to improve child health.

Kawther said: *“The use of child friendly packaging just makes it hard for parents to make a healthier choice, when companies should be making it easier. Whilst we are expecting to see restrictions on online and television advertising for foods high in fat, salt, and sugar, this does not yet apply to the packaging that may appeal to children, which is a huge concern. For too long, less healthy food has been in the spotlight which is not only unethical but also scandalous. Food businesses should only have child friendly packaging on their healthier foods and drinks to give them a starring role in children’s diets.”*

Anna Taylor OBE, Executive Director of the Food Foundation says, *“While it is really encouraging to see so many retailers act to remove cartoon characters from children’s cereals, the fact that this year 92% of cereals marketed towards children contain high or medium levels of sugar shows that much more work remains to be done. Progress is simply not happening quickly enough, and it’s concerning to see that the fibre content of these cereals remains low. Bold action will be required from both government and businesses if we are to safeguard the future health of our children - but is by no means impossible.”*

October 2021: ‘Don’t Hide What’s Inside’



We partnered with BiteBack 2030 on their report '**Don't Hide What's Inside**' which explored the eating habits of teenagers in the UK, and examined the impact that claims on packaging have on their perception of 'health'.

The research revealed over half (57%) of all products surveyed are HFSS and would receive a red front of pack label, indicating high levels of salt, sugar and/or saturated fat. In addition, nearly two-thirds (62%) of all drink products were 'dangerously' high in sugar, with less than 6% meeting guidance on free sugars.

Katharine said: *“This research has shown that misleading ‘healthy’ messages stop teenagers from looking at food labels more carefully, if they did, they would be shocked to find how many are highly processed with unpronounceable ingredients and packed full of salt, sugar and saturates.”*

Jacob Rosenbeg (aged 17) a campaigner for Bite Back says: *“It should be easy for all of us to eat healthily; it isn't... Companies are spending billions on brilliant and deliberately misleading marketing that promotes unhealthy foods to young people. We can and must change that, and protect the health and futures of millions of children. We want companies to step up and be honest with us about the food we eat.”*

Katharine says: *“Clever marketing techniques such as advertising, promotions and packaging are powerful tools to get children hooked on the sweet stuff from a young age and for life. The government’s Obesity Strategy is taking bold steps to tackle unhealthy advertising and promotions. Now they need to ensure food companies only use cartoons and health halo statements on their healthier products, allowing parents to see more of what is good for their children.”*

Sugar

August 2021: Children’s Yogurts



In August, our survey revealed over half (63%) of all yogurts survey provide a third a more of 4-6 year olds maximum daily intake of sugars. The worst offender was Nestlé Rolo Mix-in Toffee yogurt with 5 ½ teaspoons of sugar per serve (22g).

Despite these yogurts containing added sugar which is harmful to children's health, health and nutrition claims are often on pack creating a distorted 'health halo' and distracting parents from the nutrition labels.

Amelia Lake Professor of Public Health Nutrition, Teesside University said: *“As a mother of young children and a dietitian I know only too well the effects of pester power. The statistics from this research aren’t a surprise, but what is surprising is that we are allowing such high sugar foods to be directly marketed to children. It is time for action, make it clear these foods are not a healthy choice. I hope the companies and the policy makers take these important research findings on board and make food choices easier for busy parents.”*

Call to Action

Restrictions on the use of child friendly packaging, and misleading nutrition and health claims on yogurts that are high or medium in sugar.

Industry comments

Nestlé: *“Lactalis Nestlé Chilled Dairy UK is fully committed to the PHE sugar reduction programme and have an ongoing programme of innovation, reformulation and size reduction to remove calories and reduce sugar in our products. Indeed we have reduced sugar by more than 20% in our yogurt products since the baseline start of this programme in 2015 which is the equivalent of 4.8 tonnes of sugar removed.”*

April 2022 – Reformulation of ‘on the go’ sweet snacks



A new snapshot product survey carried out in collaboration with the Obesity Health Alliance exposed the huge variation in portion size and sugar content of popular ‘on the go’ sweet snacks sold in both retail and Out of Home. Cookies, brownies and doughnuts remain dangerously high in sugar, some containing up to 50% sugar, twice a child’s daily limit.

Holly says: *“Without doubt, the food industry is not motivated to reduce sugar which means more robust measures are needed to help fix the voluntary sugar reduction programme. The excess of sugar being imported and produced in the UK, sold at low cost, is undoubtedly contributing to this lack of progress. Measures such as the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, which has seen a 35% reduction in sugar within just four years, demonstrates the power of Government to help reduce population sugar intakes and lower risk of associated health implications.”*

Caroline Cerny, Alliance Lead at Obesity

Health Alliance says: *“This data demonstrates that the food industry can play a vital role in helping people reduce their sugar consumption – but not all companies are prepared to step up and play their part by reformulating their products. This is where the Government needs to step in with new regulation that creates a level playing field and financially disincentivises companies from producing and marketing sugary products. If the Government is serious about improving our health, it needs to act now.”*

Call to Action

The Government to publish its long-awaited Sugar Reduction Progress Report and announce new comprehensive, regulatory measures to incentivise industry to reduce sugar

UK Projects

This year we have been fortunate to receive external funding for a range of projects, which has allowed us to diversify our work and expand our influencing opportunities.

Influencing Early Years Nutrition, April 2022 – April 2024



Action on Sugar were awarded funding by Impact on Urban Health for a two-year project investigating the nutritional profile of food and drinks marketed to early years (i.e. children aged up to 36 months).

We will conduct in-depth products data analysis with a view to build an evidence base to inform policy on the baby/toddler food market. In doing so, we aim to achieve sustainable changes in the nutrition profile of food and drinks available in the early years – so that the food parents buy and feed their children is healthier. We will do this via three routes:

- Scale up recent successful research on toddler snacking, to include other baby food categories, with a view to improve the nutritional profile and labelling across the whole of the early years food and drink sector
- Use research to engage and influence our network of stakeholders on the importance of early years nutrition, including public policy officials, the food industry and NGOs who are not already engaged in this area

- Ensure that future policies related to unhealthy food and drinks have recognised the need to include products intended for the early years

Challenging the UK's excessive sugar beet production and consumption for better soil and health, November 2021 – November 2023



In November, Action on Sugar and Feedback UK were awarded funding by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation for a joint two-year project on the environmental and health implications of sugar beet production in the UK. Feedback UK are a campaign group that exposes systemic problems that have led to the environmentally and socially unsustainable use of resources within the global food system.

Together, we will collaborate to address the twin goals of improving public health and planetary health by seeking to:

- Change the narrative on the drivers of excessive sugar consumption to include availability (supply) alongside consumption (demand)
- Ensure that policy objectives on sugar consumption and drivers of sugar availability are linked

- Advocate for land use policy which better support a transition to sustainable horticulture

Holly's blog lays out the key arguments that will be built on throughout this project, and used to influence decision makers.

FoodFlips, February - August 2021



In collaboration with Proper Design and Queen Mary University of London, we've transformed our **FoodFlips** card game into a new and free

interactive **online learning tool** which helps children to recognise and understand food and drink labels, whilst practising maths and reading, in a light and fun way.

The functionality of the game allowed us to gather real time game play data as well as an integrated evaluation method using smiley faces so children could rate the game during play. When we had a working version of the game, we reached out to schools with the support from Queen Mary's engagement team along with posting on the Food Teachers Network website, which resulted in a group of 10 schools taking part in initial testing.

After receiving initial feedback from schools as well as selected experts in children's nutrition we made some final changes and Food Flips was ready to launch. To ensure we would be able to provide the opportunity for all children to play the game, we also worked with Queen Mary copy shop to create a hard copy version of the game for those that couldn't access the online version. With minimal resources needed for upkeep, FoodFlips will be able to be enjoyed and utilised for years to come.

International Projects

Following the official rebranding of WASSH last year to include a focus on Sugar Reduction, in November 2021, we launched our first World Sugar Awareness Week. We continued our projects in Malaysia, China and the Eastern Mediterranean Region to promote salt reduction activity in these countries, including the launch of the Malaysian Society for World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (MyWASSH).

WHO Europe: Assessing the Nutrition Content of Out of Home Meals, September – December 2021

We worked with the WHO Regional Office for Europe as part of 5 countries to assess the nutritional content of a popular meal available in the out of home sector. We developed a sampling grid and collected meals from across London. WHO Europe will launch the results of this in the coming months, and we look forward to seeing

how UK meals measure up against meals available across Europe.

Eastern Mediterranean Region: Accelerating Salt Reduction, September 2020 – December 2022

As part of a funding package of over £200k received from Resolve to Save Lives, we are working to help accelerate salt reduction

initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean region (EMRO). We are:

- Engaging with WHO EMRO and WASSH members in the region to produce and launch a regional salt reduction toolkit.
- Working with Morocco on specific, tailored projects to help accelerate their salt reduction progress: In February 2022 we signed a contract with ASAP Consulting who are working on behalf of the Ministry of Health, Morocco to identify the key contributors to salt intake and their salt content, to develop and implement salt reduction advocacy plans, and to draft a legislative text to limit salt levels in bread.
- Although in April 2022 we received approval from the Minister of Health (MoH) in Jordan to collaborate on salt reduction initiatives in the region, due to competing priorities at the MoH, we have not been able to progress this work, and instead are planning to reallocate funds to Morocco, to continue our successful collaboration there.

Malaysia: Accelerating Salt Reduction, September 2020 – December 2022

In addition to our work in EMRO, our funding package received from Resolve to Save Lives is enabling us to develop and implement measures that will help accelerate salt reduction progress in Malaysia.

This includes developing salt reduction targets for key contributors of salt intake, such as sauces and instant noodles. We are focussing particularly on soy sauce, as a major contributor to salt intake in Malaysia with good potential for reformulation. As part of this element of the project, our collaborators in Malaysia are working with local soy sauce manufacturers to study the sodium content of soy sauce and to reformulate it with less sodium. The team has analysed commercially available soy sauces for sodium content, conducted in-depth interviews with soy sauce manufacturers to determine the technology

readiness, acceptance and barriers to soy sauce reformulation, and secured agreements with five manufactures to collaborate on the product reformulation.

We will also be developing activities to support implementation of our policy to reduce salt in the out of home sector such as high level meetings and workshops with multiple stakeholders.

Malaysia: Developing a policy to reduce salt in the out of home sector, May 2020 – November 2021



Our ongoing project, funded by the MRC and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), is a qualitative study to determine the views of stakeholders across the country on salt reduction and the barriers and opportunities for the out of home sector.

We are working in collaboration with:

- **Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia**
- **University of Malaya**
- **Sunway University**
- **University Ministry of Health Malaysia**

In July 2021 we **published a scoping review** of barriers, enablers, and perceptions on dietary salt reduction in the out-of-home sectors. In the same month we also **published the protocol for a qualitative analysis** of stakeholder views towards salt reduction. Participants, including policy-makers, non-governmental organisations, food industries, school canteen operators, street food vendors and consumers were recruited from across Malaysia, and participated in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The next

stage will be to complete the thematic analysis, and use this information to develop a tailored salt reduction strategy.

Malaysia: Launch of the Malaysian Society for World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (MyWASSH), October 2021



We have worked with collaborators in Malaysia to support the development of the Malaysian Society for World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (MyWASSH), the

Malaysian equivalent of WASSH.

MyWASSH was created in October 2021, and consists of clinicians, educators, and specialists with a strong interest in reducing salt and sugar intake in Malaysia. MyWASSH seeks to support salt and sugar reduction strategies by engaging with lawmakers, the food industry, the media, health care professionals and the general public.

China: Action on Salt China, 2017 - 2022

Action on Salt China (ASC), funded by the **National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) (16/136/77)**, aims to achieve a 15% reduction in population salt intake in China. ASC has developed six programs targeting low health literacy related to salt reduction and the three major sources of salt intake in China (home cooking, restaurant foods and pre-packaged foods). These six programs include:

1. Health education and promotion
2. Application-based intervention study (AIS)
3. Home cook-based intervention study (HIS)
4. Restaurant-based intervention study (RIS)
5. Comprehensive intervention study (CIS)
6. Pre-packaged food salt reduction.

ASC is due to be completed by the end of June 2022, with substantial research outputs and

impact achieved approaching the end of the award. The primary outcomes of AIS, HIS and CIS were evaluated by 24-hour urinary sodium excretion in 6030 participants from 33 study sites in the six provinces, including 5436 adults and 594 schoolchildren; and in RIS, the salt content of meals collected from 192 restaurants have been measured by laboratory food analysis. An example output includes findings **published in the BMJ in February 2022**. Over a 12-month period, salt intake was significantly reduced by 8% (0.82g/day) in adult family members which was accompanied by a significant fall in systolic blood pressure. It is estimated that this novel approach, if scaled up across China, would prevent approximately 250,000 stroke and heart disease events per year, and also have major implications for other countries.

A large amount of health education materials have been produced and widely distributed. Approximately 6,000 participants in the six provinces took part in the intervention studies in 2018-2020, and the salt reduction interventions were scaled up to the whole six provinces in 2020-2022, benefiting over 100 million population. ASC partners have also made an important contribution to setting salt targets and improving nutrition labelling standards for pre-packaged foods and restaurant foods in China. Intensive media advocacy activities have been carried out and the research findings have been widely disseminated in China.

China: School-based education programme to reduce salt: Scaling-up in China, December 2019 – December 2023

Jointly funded by the UK Medical Research Council (MRC) and NIHR, the four year scale up study (MR/TO24399/1, led by Graham and Prof Feng He) aims to identify barriers to a **larger-scale implementation of the successful School-EduSalt study**, a school-based education programme for salt reduction in China.

In the baseline survey, a total of 1,598 participants (schoolchildren and one of their adult family members) from the three cities (Zhenjiang, Ganzhou and Qinhuangdao) completed the assessment including questionnaires, height, weight and blood pressure measurement, 24-h urine collection and 3-day salt-intake assessment.

The first round of scale-up in 40 primary schools of Zhenjiang city and Ganzhou city will be completed by the end of May and more than 13,000 students and their families participate in the programme. The second round of scale-up will start in Oct 2022, aiming to cover 260 extra schools in 3 cities in the hope of scaling up the salt-reduction education programme across at least 300 schools.

China: Comprehensive workplace intervention for cancer prevention in

China, January 2022 – January 2026

In 2022, Graham and Professor Feng He were awarded further funding by the MRC for a four year project, alongside researchers from Queen Mary University of London, The George Institute China, the National Centre for Chronic and

Noncommunicable Disease Control and Prevention within the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCNCD, China CDC) . The project aims to adapt existing evidence-based strategies and **establish a scalable model for cancer prevention** that can be widely applied in Chinese workplaces. Workplace cancer prevention interventions have been widely conducted in some high-income countries, but implementation is lacking in low- and middle-income countries.

This research is designed as a stepped wedge cluster randomised controlled trial, with an aim to recruit 15 workplaces with approximately 750 employees across three low and middle economic cities in China. Workplaces will be staggered into the intervention stage and will receive a 12-month intervention.

The primary outcome is the change in specific behaviour risk factors of employees (i.e. smoking rate, alcohol drinking, physical activity, healthy eating score and BMI). Attendance of employees, healthcare costs of organizations and the occurrence of cancer of employees will also be assessed.

Annual Awareness Weeks

Sugar Awareness Week: 8 – 14th November 2021

Sugar Awareness Week is an opportunity to celebrate emerging policies that will help reduce population sugar intake, while highlighting how much further – and faster – we have to go to ensure population health does not suffer unnecessarily.

Since the establishment of WASSH in 2005, we have coordinated a global Salt Awareness Week, but after our expansion earlier this year to include a focus on sugar, we used Sugar Awareness Week to help raise awareness of the damaging effect of too much sugar in our diet globally. We were pleased to see engagement with the campaign from many countries globally.

Theme

UK: Snacking on Sugar

This year's theme is focussing on snacks, and how they contribute to daily sugar intake. From a young age, children are getting used to the sweet taste of snack foods which influence their health in the future. We are all bombarded with sugary snack foods wherever we go, often with misleading claims on the packaging. We believe the food and drink industry should be doing more to reduce sugar and to provide healthier options.

International: Sweet or Sour?

For our first international Sugar Awareness Week, the theme was ‘Sweet or Sour?’ and we tackled sugary drinks – the leading source of sugar in diets worldwide. We aimed to raise awareness of the harmful effects of these drinks, as well as discussing the various policy actions available to address high and growing consumption.

Despite recommendations to limit intake of sugary drinks, sales are increasing globally, especially in low- and middle-income countries as a result of aggressive marketing practices. In recent years, countries have responded by developing measures to reduce sugar in the diet, including marketing restriction, taxes/levies on sugar-sweetened beverages, front-of-pack warning labels and bans on the sale of sugary drinks in schools.

UK Cross-sectional Survey: The sugars content of baby and toddler sweet snacks – and the health halo that surrounds them

NHS guidance on weaning is based around encouraging homemade snacks or mini meals, but there is a gap in advice around commercial ready-made snack foods. This gap means parents won’t have information readily available to help them make informed decisions on whether to buy ready-made snack foods and which ones to choose. In parallel, the baby and toddler snack market is growing despite the decline in the overall market.

In 2019, both the World Health Organisation (WHO) Europe and PHE made several recommendations specifically on commercial baby foods and drinks. WHO recommendations included banning misleading labelling and claims relating to sugars content or product healthiness. PHE held a consultation on their draft proposals titled ‘Commercial baby food and drink guidelines’ in 2020, the results of which are yet to be published.

We surveyed the category of baby and toddler sweet snacks, such as biscuits, rusks and oat bars across the market, examining their nutrition content, labelling, and nutrition and health claim messages.

Findings

- More than a third (37%) of baby and toddler sweet snacks are high in sugars
- The worst offender had two teaspoons of sugar per serve
- One in four products claim on pack that they are suitable for babies under the age of 12 months, even though sugar-sweetened food and drink should be avoided in this age group
- All products that were high in sugars displayed potentially misleading claims e.g. ‘Made with real fruit’ despite containing added sugar

More details can be found in our [comprehensive report](#).

Holly said: “Using healthy-sounding claims on sugary foods is normalising sweet snacks at a young age. Given just a few baby & toddler sweet snacks would be considered low in sugar, the Government must release their long-awaited commercial baby food and drink guidelines and make them mandatory to hold all companies to the same standard. The Government must also investigate the best way of labelling foods for babies and toddlers to provide better and more honest packaging for parents.”

Call to Action

- We called on the food industry to remove misleading on-pack marketing claims – especially around ‘no added sugar/refined sugar’ when such ingredients are replaced by fruit concentrates (which are still a type of free sugars and should be limited)
- We also called on the Government to finally publish its long-awaited composition guidelines for baby & toddler products which will guide manufacturers

on how much sugars should be used – making them mandatory in order to create a level-playing field across the sector.

Our survey generated more than 100 pieces of media coverage, including 23 TV and radio interviews, 5 print articles, 6 trade articles and 70 online articles.

Industry Responses

Organix: *The majority of the sugar content within Organix Soft Oaty Bars comes from dried fruit which contains naturally occurring sugars. The fruit juice concentrate used is to hold all the ingredients together, provide flavour and to give a suitable texture for a child... As a brand we are constantly looking at natural ways to reduce sugar and are excited to share new news on this in 2022.*

Heinz: *Sugar reduction is a key focus for Heinz for Baby and we are looking into ways to improve the products we make. Alongside the original rusks, Farley's offer a range of reduced-sugar rusks with 30% less sugar. The level of added sugars in these recipes is kept to a minimum consistent with the need to provide a texture which dissolves easily to avoid the risk of choking. Farley's Rusks are very different from typical biscuits, containing very little fat and no added salt.*

Blogs & Publications

To coincide with the week, we created content for our website and for external magazines and websites, which was shared and distributed on social media.

- Snacking on Sugar by Kawther for the website
- 'Mind the Baby Gap' by Holly for the website

- Time to Take Action on Sugar during Sugar Awareness Week by Kawther for Independent Nurse and Which?
- To reformulate, or not to reformulate; that is the question by Katharine for Obesity Health Alliance
- Are we facing a snackpocalypse? by Alice Jefferis, Action on Sugar volunteer
- The not-so-sweet truth about sugar-related claims on food by Letitia Leong, Action on Sugar placement student

Sugar Reduction Scorecards

As part of the week, WASSH launched global [Sugar Scorecards](#).

Led by Hattie, the scorecards provide an at-a-glance indication of a country's sugar reduction progress in terms of health status and policy.

Included

is data on key health issues associated with high sugar consumption, as well as policy actions being undertaken or planned to reduce population sugar intake. So far, we have created scorecards for twelve countries, two from each World Health Organization (WHO) region, and we will add to these over time.

European Region (EUR)	
UK	
CRITERIA	
Proportion of energy from added sugars (%)	7.0
Adult obesity prevalence (%)	28.0*
Childhood obesity prevalence (%)	21.0*
Adults with diagnosed type 2 diabetes (%)	3.9
Prevalence of dental caries in children (%)	23
Sugary drinks tax	Yes
Sugar reformulation targets	Voluntary
Front-of-pack nutrition labelling system (FOPL)	Voluntary
Marketing restrictions	Legislated restriction
Public awareness campaigns	Previous campaign
Public procurement guidelines	National or mandatory measures
Independent scrutiny	Yes
Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviours research	Yes

Webinars

UK: MyNutriWeb CPD Webinar, Taking Action on Sugar: Children's Snacks

We collaborated with the team at MyNutriWeb, a CPD accredited and free online resource enabling health professionals to stay up



to date with the latest scientific evidence, to **host a webinar during the week**. Chaired by Katharine, and with presentations from Kawther and Holly, the webinar explored three key questions:

1. Is it ok to use health claims on young children's food?
2. Do young children need snacks?
3. Do free sugars have a place in young children's diets?

International: Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) webinar

WEBINAR
In collaboration with **PAHO**

9th November 2021
9am - 10.30am ET / 1pm - 2.30pm GMT

Our speakers:

- Leo Nederveen: Acting Unit Chief, Risk Factors and Nutrition Unit & Advisor Food, Nutrition and Physical Activity in Schools - PAHO (Moderator)
- Dr Fabio Gomes Da Silva: Advisor in Nutrition and Physical Activity - PAHO
- Professor Richard Watt: University College London (UCL) - UK
- Alejandro Calvillo: El Poder del Consumidor, Mexico
- Graham MacGregor - Chair of World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (WASSH)

WASSH #SugarAwarenessWeek

WASSH collaborated with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to host a webinar titled: "Sweet or Sour? Sweet drinks conceal a sour truth". More than 500 participants from across Latin America and the UK attended the webinar, which helped raise awareness of the harmful effects of sugary drinks, and highlighted the various policy actions available to address high and growing consumption across the PAHO region. More information about the webinar, including a recording, can be found on the **PAHO website**.

Engagement

With social media content released across our Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn pages, we had more than 159,000 impressions, 4880 engagements and 480 new followers. Our hashtag #SugarAwarenessWeek gained 11,800 interactions, a reach of 6.2 million, 4,800 shares and 6,700 likes.

To aid international engagement, we translated our posters into French, Spanish and Arabic. These were shared with WASSH members and used in various country campaigns.

هل هو لاذع المشروبات الحلوة تخفي حقيقة مرة

¿DULCE O AMARGO?
Las bebidas azucaradas ocultan una verdad amarga

El consumo regular de bebidas azucaradas aumenta el riesgo de obesidad, diabetes tipo 2, caries dentales, presión alta y enfermedades cardiovasculares. Se necesitan políticas sólidas de salud pública antes de que se emerga nuestra salud.

الأسبوع العالمي للتوعية بالسكر من 8 إلى 12 نوفمبر 2021

Semana Mundial de la Concientización sobre el Azúcar 8 - 14 November 2021

#SugarAwarenessWeek @WASHSALT worldactiononsalt.com

Supporters

We are grateful for the support of 27 national health charities for our UK campaign. We also had support from public figures, including:

- Amanda Ursell RNutr, Registered Nutritionist

- Azmina Govindji, Dietitian and Nutritionist
- Charlotte Radcliffe RNutr, Registered Nutritionist
- Chris Bavin, Television Presenter for 'Eat Well for Less?' on BBC One

- Dr Sarah Jarvis, GP and Television Doctor
- Priya Tew RD, Dietitian
- Rhiannon Lambert RNutr, Registered Nutritionist

Salt Awareness Week: 14 – 20th March 2022

Our annual Salt Awareness Week public awareness campaign is our opportunity to bring attention back to salt, the forgotten killer, and the importance of reducing it to improve our health.



Theme

This year we shone a spotlight on a simple yet effective approach that will improve our health – asking the food industry to **'Shake the Salt Habit!'**

Salt reduction has been a feature of UK food policy for two decades and is accepted globally as a cost-effective strategy to improve public health. The UK's salt reduction model has inspired the world and to date, more than 90 countries now have some form of salt reduction policy in place, yet there is still so much further to go.

UK Cross-sectional Survey: 'The Real Deal'

Lunchtime meal deals are a popular meal choice for many in the UK, with 1 in 3 consumers buying

a meal bundle at least twice a week. As Covid restrictions ease and many return to workplaces, there will likely be renewed interest in lunchtime meal deal choices, particularly due to their convenience and perceived value for money, an important consideration as we face a steep rise in the cost of living. Despite their popularity and convenience, the nutritional quality of in-store meal deals has not been widely discussed. Research by Action on Sugar in 2017 revealed certain meal deals contain up to 30 teaspoons of sugar, and a recent report by ShareAction reviewed promotional practices of the four largest supermarkets (Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco) and found that up to 50% of promotions as part of a 'meal deal' promoted products high in fat, salt and/or sugar.

In 2021, the government announced that it would legislate to restrict the promotion of products high in fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) by location and volume price which will come into force in October 2022. Although location restrictions will apply to some HFSS items sold as part of meal deal promotions (i.e., not being near check-out counters or shop entrance), meal deals are, on the whole, exempt from promotion restrictions (e.g., 'buy one get one free', '3 for 2').

Our survey investigated the nutritional quality of snacks included in these meal deals.

Findings

We found almost three quarters of snacks are high in saturated fat, salt and sugars, with almost a third exceeding their maximum salt targets. We published a comprehensive report assessing the availability of healthier snacks being offered as

part of meal deals, and measured businesses offering against three metrics:

1. Proportion of snacks complying with the UK salt reduction targets
2. Proportion of snacks which are HFSS
3. Proportion of products with nutrition and health based messaging on HFSS snacks.

A component of the report involved early engagement with the food industry, to understand any challenges or limitations they face in making further reductions and provide an opportunity to explore alternative solutions. More details can be found in our [report](#).

Our survey generated 42 pieces of media coverage, including 4 trade articles and three radio broadcasts. Despite fewer pieces of coverage than last year, this was more than expected under the current news climate, with the war in Ukraine as well the rising cost of living and ongoing concerns of covid dominating the news.

Sonia said: *“In order to shift our food choices to healthier products, we need food companies to provide us with better, healthier and more affordable options. Now is the time for the food industry to act and improve the nutritional quality of the foods they sell, and if they can’t do it voluntarily, then the Government must step in and legislate, for the benefit of our health.”*

Call to Action

- The Government to enforce stronger measures to improve the nutritional quality of food, by introducing mandatory comprehensive salt reduction targets with penalties for those food companies who fail to comply.
- Retailers to only offer healthier (non-HFSS) snacks as part of ALL meal deals.

Industry Responses

Sainsbury’s: *Our priority and our strategy is focused on increasing healthy and better for you sales by 2025/26. We are publicly disclosing progress against this target, the criteria for which includes... PHE’s reformulation targets. Our teams are currently focused on driving material progress towards a clear ambition to help everyone eat better, as measured by increasing the healthiness of total sales. This impacts both our own-brand but also branded sales.*

Coop: *Helping our customers reduce their salt intake is very important to us and we are proud that 94% of our own brand products meet the 2024 salt targets, as we continue to work towards the targets and the introduction of HFSS in store regulations. Our Meal Deal snack options include a choice of healthier products and all our own brand products carry on pack nutritional information to help our customers with their choices.*

Blogs & Publications

To coincide with the week, we created content for our website and for external magazines and websites, which was shared and distributed on social media

- Graham for The House Magazine: It’s time for the tragedy of salt reduction to once again become the UK’s public health triumph
- Hattie for Food Active: Simply telling people to eat less salt does not work when our food is full of it
- Sheena for Little Dish: The importance of starting good habits early on in life
- Sonia for the website: The Real Deal: are meal deals really worth it?
- Katharine for the website: Can we shake the habit?

Webinars

Sodium Reduction Solutions Webinar



Collaboration with our colleagues at Food and Drink Federation Scotland and their Reformu8 programme opened up the opportunity to participate in a webinar on salt reduction. This allowed us to reach food businesses at various stages in their salt reduction journey.

Speakers included:

- Sonia Pombo, Campaign Manager
- Pietro Caputo, Food Engineer and Quality Controller, Saltwell
- Dr Craig Rose, Managing Director, Seaweed and Co
- Paul Hamilton, Sales Director, JPL Flavour Technologies

Ahead of the webinar we also participated in a **podcast** with FDF Scotland for their members and audience base.

The UK Salt Challenge: What is it going to take to get action?

Following on from the success of last year, we collaborated



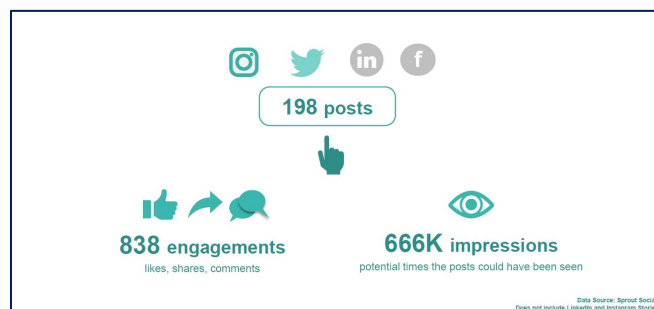
once more with the team at MyNutriWeb. During this **special edition roundtable**, leading experts covered the successes and failures of salt policy in the UK, how it compares to other countries, and what steps we should take to get action.

Our Chairman Professor MacGregor was joined by:

- Dr Sarah Jarvis GP,
- Juliette Kellow Registered Dietitian
- Amanda Ursell, Nutrition Consultant
- Joanne Lunn, Health Manager at John Lewis Partnership

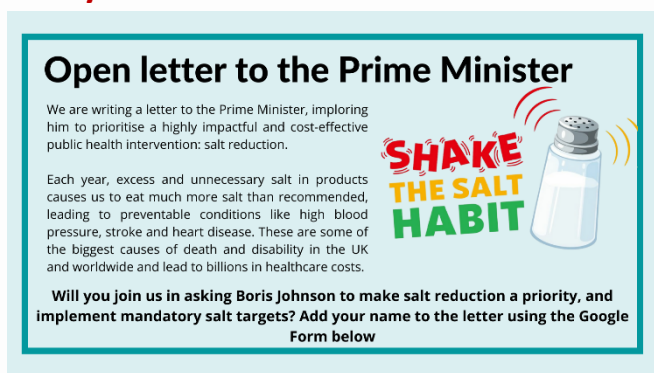
- Kimberley Neve, Researcher at the Centre for Food Policy, City University

The event proved to be very successful, with 968 registrations (predominantly dietitians and academia) confirmed at the time of Salt Awareness Week. Audience engagement was also positive, with 93% reporting an engagement score >80/100.



Collaborating with MyNutriWeb has proven to be a valuable asset to the awareness week campaign, with access to a rich hub of health professionals keen to support our work. We hope to continue working with them in the future.

Policy and Public Affairs



Open letter to the Prime Minister

We are writing a letter to the Prime Minister, imploring him to prioritise a highly impactful and cost-effective public health intervention: salt reduction.

Each year, excess and unnecessary salt in products causes us to eat much more salt than recommended, leading to preventable conditions like high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease. These are some of the biggest causes of death and disability in the UK and worldwide and lead to billions in healthcare costs.

SHAKE THE SALT HABIT

Will you join us in asking Boris Johnson to make salt reduction a priority, and implement mandatory salt targets? Add your name to the letter using the Google Form below

During the MyNutriWeb webinar, we launched our open letter to the Prime Minister, calling for mandatory salt reduction targets and asked the community to join us in co-signing. In total, 236 nutritionists, dietitians, researchers, pharmacists, nurses and GPs, alongside the Royal Society for Public Health, the Faculty of Public Health, Blood Pressure UK, Early Start Nutrition, Heart UK and the London Early Years Foundation, signed the letter, which was sent to Boris Johnson In April 2022.

To mark the week, Action on Salt and WASSH developed a policy resource highlighting 'what

works' when it comes to salt reduction policies. Decades of very strong evidence tells us unequivocally that salt negatively impacts health. Robust salt reduction policies must be prioritised to prevent millions of needless deaths globally, and save billions in healthcare costs. Results from a scoping review of real-world evidence has revealed several key elements, including:

- Bold and ambitious political leadership to implement and maintain salt reduction policies
- Mandatory salt reduction targets to create a level playing field
- Front of pack nutrition labels to incentivise reformulation
- Advocacy to aid the prioritisation of salt reduction on political agendas
- Consumer awareness campaigns to build support for salt reduction, but not to be relied on as a standalone tool for salt reduction
- Interventions in the out of home sector and fiscal measures on added salt products could ensure wider progress

During the week, Action on Salt and WASSH hosted a virtual roundtable with key stakeholders to discuss the UK's salt reduction programme. The purpose of the roundtable was to create consensus that salt reduction progress is needed to prevent cardiovascular disease, responsible for one in four deaths in the UK, and identify how to accelerate progress.



Participants discussed broad themes, drawing on their diverse experiences in public health and prevention to identify common ground on the need for salt reduction in the UK, and highlight

barriers and opportunities to achieving progress in salt reduction. Participants agreed that political focus in recent years has centred on obesity prevention – and rightly so – but salt reduction is essential to preventing cardiovascular disease; the voluntary nature of the programme is an issue; the public must be mobilised to demand lower salt products; and a wider range of stakeholders should be involved in the policy.

Engagement

We continue to focus our engagement and consumer messaging through our social media channels Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. During the week we made 236 new followers across all platforms, and made over 246,000 interactions using our hashtag #SaltAwarenessWeek. We also translated our posters into Arabic, Spanish, Italian, Mandarin and French to aid international engagement. More than 20 countries supported the awareness week.

Supporters



This year we were fortunate enough to have support from 19 national health charities for our UK campaign.

We also had some fantastic support from public figures and health professionals, who helped disseminate our message across their respective audiences.

Research

May 2021

A series of studies were published about our previous international project in Malaysia: the Malaysian Community Salt Survey (MyCoSS), which ran from 2017 to 2019:

- Risk factors related with high sodium intake among Malaysian adults: findings from the Malaysian Community Salt Survey (MyCoSS) 2017-2018
[Abdul Aziz NS, Ambak R, Othman F, He FJ, Yusof M, Pawai F, Abdul Ghaffar S, Mohd Yusof MF, Cheong SM, MacGregor G, Aris T. J Health Popul Nutr. 2021;40\(Suppl 1\):14.](#)
- High sodium food consumption pattern among Malaysian population
[Ahmad MH, Man CS, Othman F, He FJ, Salleh R, Noor NSM, Kozil WNKW, MacGregor G, Aris T. J Health Popul Nutr. 2021;40\(Suppl 1\):4.](#)
- The prevalence of hypertension among Malaysian adults and its associated risk factors: data from Malaysian Community Salt Study (MyCoSS)
[Zaki NAM, Ambak R, Othman F, Wong NI, Man CS, Morad MFA, He FJ, MacGregor G, Palaniveloo L, Baharudin A. J Health Popul Nutr. 2021;40\(Suppl 1\):8.](#)

June 2021

Dietary Sodium 'Controversy'—Issues and Potential Solutions

This review summarises the issues that have led to the limited view that salt reduction is a controversial issues, including inappropriate research methodology, conflicts of interest, and questions of professional conduct.

[Campbell NRC, He FJ, Cappuccio FP, MacGregor GA. Dietary sodium 'controversy' – issues and potential solutions. Curr Nutr Rep 2021;10:188-199](#)

July 2021

Developing a policy to reduce the salt content of food consumed outside the home in Malaysia: protocol of a qualitative study

A protocol paper, detailing a qualitative analysis of stakeholder views towards salt reduction. The protocol highlights how participants will be recruited from the five zones of Malaysia, including policy-

makers, non-governmental organisations and food industries.

[Brown MK, Shahar S, You YX, et al Developing a policy to reduce the salt content of food consumed outside the home in Malaysia: protocol of a qualitative study BMJ Open 2021;11:e044628](#)

Salt reduction to prevent hypertension: the reasons of the controversy

In this article, methodological problems such as reverse causality and inaccurate and biased estimation of salt intake are highlighted as reasons why limited studies identify salt reduction as controversial.

[He FJ, Campbell NRC, Woodward M, MacGregor GA. Salt reduction to prevent hypertension: the reasons of the controversy. Eur Heart J 2021;42:2501-2505](#)

August 2021

Barriers, Enablers and Perceptions on Dietary Salt Reduction in the Out-of-Home Sectors: A Scoping Review

Perceptions, barriers and enabling factors for a reduction in dietary salt intake in the out of home sector were investigated in this scoping review. This review should be considered by policymakers in the development of successful salt reduction strategies that are tailored to the out of home sector.

[Michael V, You YX, Shahar S, Manaf ZA, Haron H, Shahrir SN, Majid HA, Chia YC, Brown MK, He FJ, MacGregor GA. Barriers, Enablers, and Perceptions on Dietary Salt Reduction in the Out-of-Home Sectors: A Scoping Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2021 Jul 30;18\(15\):8099](#)

Sodium and Potassium Excretion of Schoolchildren and Relationship with Their Family Excretion in China

This cross-sectional study found that sodium and potassium excretion are associated with family excretions; therefore, salt reduction and potassium enhancement in children should engage families and schools.

[Li Y, Sun Y, Dong L, Cheng F, Luo R, Wang C, Song J, He FJ, MacGregor GA, Zhang P. Sodium and potassium excretion of schoolchildren and relationship with their family excretion in China. Nutrients 2021;13:2864](#)

October 2021

Impact of color-coded and warning nutrition labelling schemes: A systematic review and network meta-analysis

This systematic review and meta-analysis summarises the current available research to update the knowledge of the most popular 'interpretive' front-of-pack nutrition labelling, which were found to be effective in directing consumers towards more healthy purchases.

[Song J, Brown MK, Tan M, MacGregor GA, Webster J, Campbell NRC, et al. \(2021\) Impact of color-coded and warning nutrition labelling schemes: A systematic review and network meta-analysis. PLoS Med 18\(10\): e1003765.](#)

Cross-sectional comparisons of sodium content in processed meat and fish products among five countries: potential for feasible targets and reformulation

Analysis of locally-available processed meats and fish products in five countries found variations in salt content, with China having the highest mean salt content, followed by the US, South Africa, Australia and the UK.

[Song Y, Ly Y, Guo C, Wang Y, Huang L, Tan M, He FJ, Harris T, MacGregor GA, Ding J, Dong L, Liu Y, Wang H, Zhang P, Ma Y. Cross-sectional comparisons of sodium content in processed meat and fish products among five countries: potential for feasible targets and reformulation. BMJ Open 2021;11:e046412](#)

November 2021

Nutritional Quality of Plant-Based Meat Products Available in the UK: A Cross-Sectional Survey

This study found that although plant-based meat products are unnecessarily high in salt compared to equivalent meat products, with more than 75% of the products surveyed not meeting the Government's salt reduction targets.

[Alessandrini R, Brown, MK, Pombo-Rodrigues S, Bhageerutty S, He FJ, MacGregor GA. Nutritional Quality of Plant-Based Meat Products Available in the UK: A Cross-Sectional Survey. Nutrients 2021, 13, 4225.](#)

24-Hour Urinary Sodium and Potassium Excretion and Cardiovascular Risk

The authors found that higher salt intake was significantly associated with higher risk of stroke and heart disease in a dose-response manner, while a higher potassium intake led to lower risk of stroke and heart disease.

[Ma Y, He FJ, Sun Q, Yuan C, Kiener LM, Curhan GC, MacGregor GA, Bakker SJL, Campbell NRC, Wang M, Rimm EB, Manson JE,](#)

[Willett WC, Hofman A, Gansevoort RT, Cook NR, Hu FB. 24-Hour Urinary Sodium and Potassium Excretion and Cardiovascular Risk. N Engl J Med. 2022 Jan 20;386\(3\):252-263](#)

Serum sodium and risk of hypertension: a cohort study

This study investigated the association between serum sodium and blood pressure, finding that an elevated serum sodium level was associated with an increased risk of developing hypertension. This suggests serum sodium could be a potential risk factor for hypertension.

[Hu H, Eguchi M, Miki T, Kochi T, Kabe I, Nanri A, MacGregor GA, Mizoue T, He FJ. Hypertension Res 2022;45:354-359](#)

January 2022

Better Late Than Never: The FDA's Sodium Reduction Targets

Following the release of the US Food and Drug Administration's sodium reduction targets in October 2021, this editorial welcomes their delayed implementation but highlights that a voluntary approach can be problematic by drawing on lessons from the UK.

[Brown MK, Song J, MacGregor GA, Tan M, He FJ. Better Late Than Never: The FDA's Sodium Reduction Targets. Am J Public Health. 2022 Feb;112\(2\):191-193.](#)

February 2022

Delayed Finalization of Sodium Targets in the United States May Cost Over 250,000 Lives by 2031

This modelling study estimated the health benefits of implementing voluntary salt reduction targets in the US, finding more than 445,000 lives could be saved over the coming 10 years. However, this study also estimated that more than 260,000 deaths could occur as a result of the FDA's delay in getting the short-term targets in place.

[Song J, Brown MK, Cobb LK, Jacobson MF, Ide N, MacGregor GA, He FJ. Delayed Finalization of Sodium Targets in the United States May Cost Over 250 000 Lives by 2031. Hypertension. 2022 Apr;79\(4\):798-808](#)

App based education programme to reduce salt intake (AppSalt) in schoolchildren and their families in China: parallel, cluster randomised controlled trial

This randomised controlled trial, involving 54 primary schools from three provinces in northern, central, and southern China found that when children were taught, with support of a smartphone app, about salt

reduction and assigned homework to encourage their families to participate in activities to reduce salt consumption, salt intake in adult family members fell.

He FJ, Zhang P, Luo R, Li Y, Sun Y, Chen F, Zhao Y, Zhao W, Li D, Chen H, Wu T, Yao J, Lou C, Zhou S, Dong L, Liu Y, Li X, He J, Wang C, Tan M, Song J, MacGregor GA. App based education programme to reduce salt intake (AppSalt) in schoolchildren and their families in China: parallel, cluster randomised controlled trial. BMJ. 2022 Feb 9;376:e066982.

This was accompanied by an opinion article in the BMJ: Can children play a role in reducing families' salt intake?

He FJ, Zhang P, Li Y, MacGregor GA. BMJ 2022;376:o381

Sodium and Health: Old Myths and a Controversy Based on Denial

This article delves into the flaws of many recent ill-founded claims that reducing salt intake does not consistently reduce CVD and calls on journal editors to ensure that research be rigorously challenged by independent reviewers before publication..

Cappuccio FP, Campbell NRC, He FJ, Jacobson MF, MacGregor GA, Antman E, Appel LJ, Arcand J, Blanco-Metzler A, Cook NR, Guichon JR, L'Abbè MR, Lackland DT, Lang T, McLean RM et al. Sodium and Health: Old Myths and a Controversy Based on Denial. Curr Nutr Rep. 2022 Jun;11(2):172-184. doi: 10.1007/s13668-021-00383-z. Epub 2022 Feb 14

Building Relationships

We prioritise collaboration with key organisations in the UK and internationally, including:

Adopt a School	China National Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment	The George Institute for Global Health
Alcohol Change UK		Heart UK
Alcohol Focus Scotland	Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention	Heart Research UK
Alcohol Health Alliance		Impact on Urban Health
American Heart Association	Chinese Centre for Health Education	Institute of Alcohol Studies
Association for the Study of Obesity	Consumers International	Jamie Oliver Foundation
Barts Community Smiles	CRONICAS Peru	Kidney Research UK
Blood Pressure UK	Dental Wellness Trust	Libertine
Breast Cancer UK	Department of Health and Social Care	Living Loud
British Dental Association Scotland	Diabetes UK	Meniere's Society
British Dietetic Association	European Salt Action Network	Ministry of Health Malaysia
British Heart Foundation	Faculty of General Dental Practice	MyNutriWeb
Cancer Research UK	Faculty of Public Health	National Obesity Forum
The Caroline Walker Trust	Food Active	Nesta
Center for Science in the Public Interest	Food Ethics Council	Nourish Scotland
Chefs in Schools	The Food Foundation	Obesity Action Scotland
Child Growth Foundation	The George Institute China	Obesity Health Alliance
Children's Food Campaign		Oral Health Foundation

Polycystic Kidney Disease

Public Health England

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Royal Academy of Culinary Arts

Royal College of Nursing

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

Royal Society for Public Health

Scottish Obesity Alliance

ShareAction

Soil Association

Sugar Smart

Sunway University, Malaysia

Sustain

Sustainable Restaurant Association

Stroke Association

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

University of Malaya

Which?

World Health Organization and regional offices

World Cancer Research Fund

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Impact
on **Urban
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Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health
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