

# UNILEVER'S POSITION ON SALT REDUCTION



## **Background**

Our body needs a little bit of sodium. Sodium along with potassium helps in maintaining the right balance of fluids in the body, like to keep a healthy blood pressure. Sodium is also essential for nerve and muscle function. However, elevated sodium intake can lead to raised blood pressure and increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, like stroke.

Dietary salt is the main source of sodium. Global salt intake is around 9 to 12 grams a day, much higher than the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended maximum salt intake of 5 grams per day. Urgent action is required to reduce salt intake. Moreover, reducing salt intake has been identified as one of the most cost-effective measures to improve populations health outcome, among others emphasized by WHO.

## **Context**

Salt plays a key role in food products. As saltiness is one of the basic taste sensations, salt plays an important role in the eating experience of consumers. It has its own taste, and it enhances the taste of other flavours. Salt also has a technical role in products, like for texture, stability, and processing. Moreover, it is key for food safety as it prevents microbial growth, and therefore has been a very common preservative, used for thousands of years.

## **Unilever's position**

As a Food manufacturer we have the responsibility to offer products that fit in a healthy diet and consequently have the duty to reduce the amount of salt across our portfolio. We started our sodium reduction journey in 2003, in an effort to help consumers limit their daily salt intake to the WHO maximum intake recommendation of 5 gram per day. We continue to progress on this journey as explicitly stated in our most recent Future Foods initiative.

Consumer acceptance is a key success factor in any salt reduction strategy. Consumers will not give up taste for health, hence it requires a stepwise salt reduction over years, adding more taste by using more herbs and spices and only use salt replacers if needed. Great-tasting products will have the most impact in combination with education. An increase in people's own salt awareness and behaviour is needed to prevent they will add salt back themselves.



## **Working with others**

We work together with governments, NGOs and all food chain stakeholders to find the best solutions that have a positive impact on public health, including salt reduction.

We participate in collaborative programmes initiated by governments, other stakeholders as well as by industries. They can be voluntary or mandatory in nature, ideally meeting certain conditions, e.g.:

- Collaborative approach with industry involved to set realistic criteria and timings
- Realistic targets based on sound scientific evidence and consensus, in line with WHO recommendations on maximum salt intake to have clear impact on public health
- Creating a level playing field among all food industry players
- Taking into account technological limitations and the need to maintain consumers' product acceptance, e.g., role of salt in product, standards of identity
- Lifting potential regulatory hurdles (e.g., use of potassium salt as salt replacer)
- Supported by consumer awareness/education campaigns developed and led by government agencies or NGOs
- External monitoring systems put in place to track progress on targets and public health impact, led by government or independent agencies, preferably with limited reporting burden to participants, e.g. by using already existing data systems

## **What did we achieve already?**

We have already taken several steps to offer consumers products with less salt, including:

- In 2003, we launched the Nutrition Enhancement Programme with our first sodium criteria, based on a profiling system which assessed foods for specific nutrients of concern
- In 2009, we launched our sodium reduction strategy with even stricter sodium standards for all our products groups. Modelling<sup>1</sup> proves that with these standards, consumers can limit their daily salt intake to a maximum of 5 gram per day.
- In 2010, these sodium standards became part of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan with concrete time-bound commitments:
  - We committed to ensuring that by 2020 75% of our Foods portfolio would help consumers stay within the 5 gram maximum daily intake recommended by WHO. We have exceeded this goal with 77% of our foods meeting these criteria by 2020.

- This means we have removed more than 37 million tonnes of salt from our products, the equivalent of almost 15,000 Olympic swimming pools, with an average salt reduction of 27% across our Foods portfolio.



Our progress towards delivering these commitments is published annually and can be found at <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/improving-health-and-well-being/improving-nutrition/>.

### **What more will we do**

In 2020, as part of the Future Foods initiative, we strengthened our targets even further and committed to increase compliance to 85% of our Foods portfolio that would help consumers stay within the 5 gram maximum daily intake recommended by WHO by 2022.

For more information on our commitments to nutrition see <https://www.unilever.com/planet-and-society/positive-nutrition/>.

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<sup>1</sup>Dötsch-Klerk M, Goossens W PMM, Meijer GW and van het Hof KH. Reducing salt in food; setting product-specific criteria aiming at a salt intake of 5 g per day European Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2015), 1–6