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**Real Deal – Nearly Three Quarters of Snacks Included in Meal Deals Are Dangerously High in Fat, Salt, and Sugar – according to NEW Research**

* Nearly one in three (30%) snacks are far too high in salt – according to new research by Action on Salt, despite salt reduction programme
* ALL eight high street stores offer meal deal combos (a sandwich, snack, and drink) with MORE salt than a McDonald’s Big Mac and fries
* Almost three quarters (70%) of snacks included in meal deals sold on the high street are dangerously high in saturated fat, salt and sugar (HFSS)
* Sainsbury’s the ‘best of a bad bunch’ in their meal deal snack offering, with Subway lagging behind
* Action on Salt is calling for stronger measures to improve the nutritional quality of food, including enforcing the salt reduction targets, and only non-HFSS (healthier) snacks to be included in all meal deals

NEW research[[1]](#endnote-2) from Action on Salt (based at Queen Mary University of London) has revealed a whopping 70% of ‘meal deal’[[2]](#endnote-3) snacks sold on the high street are dangerously high in saturated fat, salt and sugar (HFSS)[[3]](#endnote-4) – with some contributing to a third of an adult’s maximum daily recommended salt intake[[4]](#endnote-5). Given that salt raises blood pressure and causes strokes and heart attacks, the biggest causes of death in the UK, AND that one in three of us buy a meal deal at least twice a week[[5]](#endnote-6), these findings are deeply concerning.

To mark Salt Awareness Week (14th - 20th March), Action on Salt is now demanding the Government 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. Furthermore, the group of experts is calling on retailers to only offer healthier (non-HFSS) snacks as part of ALL meal deals.

***Products High in Salt***

Despite nearly two decades of voluntary efforts to get the food industry to reduce the huge and unnecessary amounts of salt in our food, many of these snacks contain far too much salt. *Co-op Lemon and Coriander Green Olives* is the worst offender with 2.02g salt per pack – that's the equivalent of 5x portions of salted peanuts[[6]](#endnote-7) and a third of an adult’s maximum daily recommended salt intake.

Whilst these snacks fall under various government salt reduction targets for the food industry to work towards[[7]](#endnote-8), overall, a third (30%) of meal deal snacks exceed their maximum salt target, in particular meat products and biscuits. Snacks bought on a meal deal in Morrisons are more likely to fail to meet their salt target (46%) compared to snacks sold at Sainsbury’s (19%).

Examples of products failing to meet their salt targets include:

* *Ginsters Cornish Pasty 180g* (sold in Co-op) – 1.89g salt in 1 pasty, more salt than 5.5 packets of ready salted crisps[[8]](#endnote-9)
* *Ginsters Large Sausage Roll 130g* (sold in Asda and Co-op) – 1.42g salt in 1 sausage roll, more salt than 4 packets of ready salted crisps
* *Jacob’s mini cheddars 50g* (sold in most retailers) – 1.2g in a 50g bag, more salt than 3 Mini Babybel’s[[9]](#endnote-10)
* *Love Corn Smoked BBQ 45g* (sold in Tesco)– 1g per pack, more salt than 2.5 portions of KP salted nuts
* *Pep'd Up Peperami Chicken Bites 50g* (sold in Asda)– 0.96g per pack, more salt than 4.5 slices of wafer-thin ham[[10]](#endnote-11)

What’s more, each of the eight stores surveyed selling a chicken sandwich, wrap or ‘sub’ as part of their **meal deal combo**[[11]](#endnote-12) were saltier than a McDonald’s Big Mac and fries'[[12]](#endnote-13) (2.92g)! In fact, Subway had the saltiest meal deal containing a staggering 5.3g of salt – that’s nearly a whole day’s worth of salt in just one meal, and that’s without many of the optional extras!iv

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Retailer | Main | Salt (g) | Total salt content (g) |
| Subway | Mega Meat Sub with American style cheese and Sriracha sauceDoritos Tangy Cheese NachosRainbow Candy Chip CookieLipton Iced Tea Peach 500ml | 4.5g 0.4g0.3g0.1g | 5.3g |
| Tesco  | Tesco Chicken Club SandwichTesco Green Olives with HerbsOasis Citrus Punch 500ml | 2g1.8g0.4g | 4.2g |
| Boots  | Boots Chicken & Bacon, Chicken Salad and Chicken Stuffing Sandwich Heck Bangin' Bites 97% Cocktails with a Sausage SauceUFit Chocolate Orange Protein Shake 310ml | 1.83g 1.95g0.71g | 4.49g |
| Coop | Co-op Chicken and Bacon Sandwich Co-op Lemon & Coriander Green Olives 65gLucozade Energy Orange 500ml | 1.97g2.02g0.14g | 4.13g |
| Sainsbury’s | Sainsbury’s Chicken & Maple Cured Bacon SandwichSainsbury's Trio of OlivesLucozade Energy Orange 500ml | 1.78g 1.47g0.14g | 3.39g |
| Morrison’s | Heavenly Taste Chicken Tandoori WrapMorrison Fish Sushi Snack PackOasis Zero Summer Fruits 500ml | 1.5g1.12g0.46g | 3.08 |
| Asda | Asda Chicken and Bacon Caesar TripleAsda Fish Sushi Snack PackOasis Zero Summer Fruits 500ml | 2.0g 1.15g0.46g | 3.61g |
| Shell  | Jamie Oliver deli by Shell Roast Chicken & Bacon SandwichJacob’s Mini Cheddars Original 50gLucozade Energy Orange 500ml | 1.74g1.2g0.14g | 3.08g |

***Products High in Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS)***

The research, which analysed all snack products included as part of meal deals across 8x retailers, exposed ASDA and Subway as the worst offenders providing the highest proportion (82%) of **unhealthy snacks (HFSS)** in their meal deal promotions.

Next up were Co-op and Shell, with more than three quarters of their snacks on offer deemed unhealthy. By comparison, Morrisons offer a marginally healthier proportion of snacks, although they were still within a majority at 63% HFSS.

***Nutrition and Health-based Claims***

Despite nearly two thirds (63%) of snacks having some form of perceived nutrition or health-based message[[13]](#endnote-14) on pack or in the product description, a shocking 70% of them would score as a HFSS food. Whilst these marketing claims are legal, they have been shown to be misleading to consumers by creating a ‘health halo’ and discouraging shoppers from scrutinising the label more thoroughly. For example, *Peperami* includes health messages: *‘protein kick’ and ‘112kcal per stick’* yet it contains 3.9g salt per 100g – that’s 1.6x the concentration of Atlantic seawater![[14]](#endnote-15)

In fact, most snacks surveyed with nutrition and health messaging on pack across stores were HFSS. The worst offender being Subway with 83%, followed by Asda (82%) and Shell (80%). No food retailer did not use this marketing tactic excessively.

***Which is the best deal?***

No store stands out as leaders in healthier snack options within meal deal promotions (based on a set of key metrics[[15]](#endnote-16)). Sainsbury’s ranked more favourably, offering a higher proportion of non-HFSS snacks with a greater overall compliance to the salt reduction targets. In contrast, Subway scored among the lowest for their meal deal snack offering.

**Sheena Bhageerutty, Assistant Nutritionist at Action on Salt, said:**

“Without doubt, meal deals are hugely popular especially amongst the nation’s workforce looking for a convenient and ‘value for money’ lunch. Yet unbeknown to many consumers, these meal combos and snacks are often exceedingly high in salt which means an adult can consume their maximum daily recommended salt intake in just one meal without even knowing it. Rather than trying to ‘upsell’ us on salt, saturated fat and sugar, CEOs of food retailers must act more responsibly by setting strict internal standards including only healthier snack options as part of the ‘deal’.”

**Sonia Pombo, Campaign Manager for Action on Salt, added:**

“Despite the overwhelming impact on health, many companies appear to have forgotten that salt is a killer. These findings are well and truly shocking, especially given the vast amount of people that purchase these meal deals on a regular basis. 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.”

**Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary University of London, and Chairman of Action on Salt, said:**

“Reducing salt is the most cost-effective measure for lowering blood pressure and reducing the number of people suffering and dying from strokes, heart disease and life changing disabilities associated with this – all of which is completely avoidable. Given the fact that food companies have the very simple option to reformulate with less salt and help prevent the many thousands of people who currently die unnecessarily, it’s remarkable that very few companies choose this option. This is why the Government must enforce its comprehensive salt reduction targets without delay.”

**ENDS**

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**Notes to editors:**

***About Action on Salt***

Action on Salt is a group concerned with salt and its effects on health, supported by 22 expert scientific members. 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 at the table.

1. Survey details. Please see Action in Salt’s ‘The Real Deal – Nutritional Profile of Snacks in Meal Deal Promotions’ for more detail. Action on Salt surveyed all snacks made available as part of high street meal deal offers. Data was collected from all major high street stores with an established lunch time meal deal.

Full nutritional information of snacks included as part of the meal deal offering (energy, fat, saturates, sugars, fibre, protein, and salt per 100g and per portion) was collected online and in store (Asda, Boots, Co-op, Shell, Morrisons, Sainsbury’s, Subway and Tesco) in January 2022. In addition to nutrition information, the use and type of nutrition claims, as well as the full ingredients list, was recorded. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Meal deals typically contain a sandwich or salad as a main, a snack and a drink at different price points (e.g., set price, choose 3 items for the price of 2) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. iiiProducts high in fat, salt and/or sugars (HFSS) are classified by the Department of Health Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) - foods scoring 4 or more points and drinks scoring 1 or more are classified as HFSS. Department of Health and Social Care, 2011. Nutrient Profiling Technical Guidance. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216094/dh_123492.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Maximum daily intakes for an adult is 6g/day, about a level teaspoon. SACN Salt & Health Report 2003 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338782/SACN_Salt_and_Health_report.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. https://www.talkingretail.com/news/industry-news/popularity-meal-deals-revealed-survey-21-05-2018/ [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. KP original salted peanuts contain 0.39g salt <https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/gol-ui/product/kp-nuts/kp-original-salted-peanuts-500g> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. PHE (2020). Salt reduction targets for 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/915406/2024_salt_reduction_targets_070920-FINAL-1.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Walker’s ready salted crisps contain 0.34g salt <https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/254926800> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. 1 Mini babybel contains 0.36g salt, <https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/307346979> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. 1 slice of Tesco’s wafer thin honey roast ham contains 0.2g salt <https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/303881155> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Based on chicken as the most popular sandwich filling of 2021 <https://bakeryinfo.co.uk/events/british-sandwich-week-nations-favourite-fillings-revealed/656356.article> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. A McDonald’s Big Mac and medium fries contains 2.92g salt according to [www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. These include claims such as ‘vegan’, ‘No MSG’, ‘No artificial colours or preservatives’, ‘high protein’, ‘low fat’, ‘only Xkcal’, ‘Gluten free’ etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Atlantic seawater contains 1.0g of sodium per 100g, which equates to 2.5g of salt per 100g [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Considering the proportion of snacks available in meal deals which are high in fat, salt and sugar, the percentage meeting the salt targets, and responsible marketing practices i.e., no nutrition or health claims on foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar. More details can be found in Action on Sugar’s report ‘The Real Deal – Nutritional Profile of Snacks in Meal Deal Promotions’ [↑](#endnote-ref-16)