

Self-regulation leaves bad taste as food industry fails to drop the salt

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Major Australian food manufacturers are failing to deliver on voluntary commitments to make healthier products when it comes to salt, according to a new study of salt levels in foods on our supermarket shelves.

Professor Bruce Neal, [executive director](#) at the George Institute said that unhealthy diets were a leading cause of death globally and excess salt consumption was a major culprit.

"The majority of the salt we eat is hidden in processed and packaged foods and most people aren't aware that the amount they are consuming is raising their blood pressure and shortening their lives," Prof Neal said.

George Institute for Global Health researchers used their FoodSwitch database to analyze the salt content of over 4,500 products from 16 Australian [food](#) manufacturers and see if there were any positive changes between 2013 and 2017.

10 of the companies included were members of The International Food and Beverage Alliance

(IFBA) which has committed to improve the healthiness of products though reformulation, including salt reduction.

The study found no clear evidence of reductions in salt levels overall, or by IFBA member companies between 2013 and 2017.

"Although many manufacturers have made commitments to improve the salt levels of their products, rather few seem to have acted on these commitments," he said.

"We did find a wide variation in the [salt content](#) of many quite similar foods and drinks in the study," added Prof Neal, "which means it's technically quite possible to [manufacturer](#) lower salt versions."

"There are clearly other reasons why manufacturers aren't reducing salt levels. It suggests to me that when it comes to salt, voluntary pledges are not enough. We need government to step in and drive this, with regulation probably" he added.

While there were some product categories such as processed meat, ready meals, and savory snacks where improvement were seen, there were many more that were unchanged.

"It's very hard for consumers to track what they are buying because salt levels are written in very small lettering on the back of the package—this really does place the onus on the manufacturers to do better. You would hope that IFBA members, who are some of the largest companies in the world, would be able to do better."

Eating too much salt increases people's [blood pressure](#) which is one of the biggest contributors to [premature death](#) from stroke or heart disease. At about 9g per day, average salt intake in Australia is almost double WHO recommendations (5g per day). Worldwide, excess [salt](#) intake is estimated to

cause about 3 million deaths each year.

More information: Rhoda N Ndanuko et al. Changes in sodium levels of processed foods among the International Food and Beverage Association member companies in Australia: 2013-2017, *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis* (2020). DOI: [10.1016/j.jfca.2019.103405](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfca.2019.103405)

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