

A GUIDE TO SODIUM LABELLING

Especially of low sodium products

FOR CONSUMERS

AUSTRALIAN IMPORTERS, MANUFACTURERS and SUPERMARKETS

When searching for low sodium products I continue to come across problems with sodium labelling. There seem to be far too many mistakes being made. The level of sodium should be of concern to everybody as the Dietary Guidelines for Australia recommend that we all should eat foods low in sodium. "Low" is defined as a sodium level of 120mg/100g or lower. The sodium level is of vital importance to people with some serious medical conditions like heart failure and Meniere's Disorder.

If you want to know why salt (sodium) in food is a problem see www.saltmatters.org Products with incorrect sodium labelling hang around for months, sometimes years. The sooner they are weeded out the better. To those responsible for the labelling of products my advice is to please: **Get it right the first time**. Double check before you put a label on a product that harms people, costs you money, and diminishes the reputation of your company.

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION

There is plenty of information available on preparing nutrition labels at FOOD STANDARDS AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND. Look for the "Food Standards Code" button.

www.foodstandards.gov.au/

The following document is a mine of information about how to make an approved food label. If the link fails search on Google for "Label Buster".

www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/28009.pdf

Use this link to check if a food additive contains sodium.

www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodmatters/foodadditives.cfm

CHECKING THE SODIUM LINE ON THE NUTRITION PANEL

If there is no nutrition panel, there better be a good reason. Check the first two links above. (see note 5).

If the nutrition panel does not have a sodium line, report/fix it.

If the sodium is not shown as “mg”, report/fix it. Sodium can **in addition** be shown as an a mmol value. (see note 1).

If the sodium level is 0.0mg and it is not a simple or pure product like sugar or oil report/fix/check it.

If it has less sodium than other similar products, suspect it. Suspect it more the further away from normal it is.

Special attention for labels that show sodium of **120mg/100g** or less and are not marked "No added salt" or "Reduced Salt"

If it mentions salt (see note 2) in the ingredients list suspect it. Suspect it more the further up the ingredients list you find the salt.

If the word “salt” or :salted” is part of the product name suspect it.

If you can taste salt in the product suspect it. Note the “in”. You may be able to taste salt at this level if it is on the product.

If baking powder, raising agent (500) or bicarbonate of soda is mentioned, suspect it. Suspect it more if it is without a lot of sweet filling or sauce (see note 3).

If you have a laboratory report or a product specification sheet from a supplier, double check the level if any of the above apply. An additional sodium test should cost less than \$40.

If it is an overseas product tripple check that the decimal point is in the correct place.

AS the claimed sodium level drops, your level of scepticism should increase. At about 50mg/100g, any mention of salt, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda or (500) means the chance of it being correct is almost zero.

Notes:

Note(1) 1 mmol of sodium equals 23mg.

Note(2) If you are lucky the ingredients list may give the % salt. 1% salt = around 390mg of sodium per 100g.

Note(3) Some products such as packet mixes give the sodium of the food as prepared. A dry packet of mix may end up as a small amount of salty cake floating on a low salt sauce giving a lower sodium level overall. Do not forget to consider the sodium from any added ingredients that are specified like eggs. (A 59g egg has approx. 69mg of sodium)

*Note(4) Many products have had decimal mix ups like .6g translated to 6mg instead of 600mg and this occurred here and overseas.

*Note(5) Small packages need not have a nutrition panel but if they are labelled No Added Salt or similar they must show the sodium per 100g.

EXAMPLES



Ketjap Manis is a thick soy type sauce. It tastes strongly of salt. 0 mg is ridiculous.

The overseas manufacturer reports that the sodium level is 7700mg/100g.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 30		
Serving size (1 biscuit = 10 g)		
Average Quantity:	per Serving	per 100 g
Energy	204 kJ	2040 kJ
Protein	0.8 g	8.0 g
Fat, total	2.3 g	23 g
- saturated	1.2 g	12 g
Carbohydrate	6.2 g	62 g
- sugar	1.8 g	18 g
Sodium	3 mg	29 mg

Spiced Biscuits with Almonds
 Ingredients: wheat flour, sugar, vegetable fat, hardened vegetable oil, almonds (10%), caramel sugar syrup, spices, salt, raising agents (500, 503).
 BEST BEFORE: See date printed on side of pack.

Store in a cool, dry place.

The biscuits above looked to be low sodium but competitors' biscuits showed 500mg/100g. Later the very-low-salt biscuits were seen with 180mg/100g. Normally just the mention of salt means 100mg/100g or more.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 16 Serving Size: 30g		
	Average Quantity Per 30g serve	Average Quantity Per 100g serve
Energy	83.4kJ	278kJ
Protein	0.3g	1.1g
Fat - Total	0g	0.1g
- Saturated	0g	0g
Carbohydrate	4.4g	14.6g
- Sugars	4.3g	14.3g
Sodium	25.5mg	84.9mg

INGREDIENTS: AUSTRALIAN ONIONS 60%, WATER, SUGAR, FOOD ACID (260, 270), SALT, SPICE EXTRACT, PRESERVATIVE (220).

These pickled onions tasted salty.

They appeared later with 1130mg/100g.

Chocolate coated gingerbreads with apricot filling.

This could be a low sodium product but who knows when it is shown as "less than 1g" which contravenes the standard. Sodium should be in mg and "less than" is only allowed for levels lower than 5mg.

This is a sticker on the imported product. The original packing did not list sodium.

A test costing under \$40 would provide an accurate answer.

INGREDIENTS: apricot fruit filling 28% (apricots, glucose-fructose syrup, sugar, gelling agent [440], acid regulator [330], flavouring, acidity regulator [331]), wheat flour, milk chocolate 21% (sugar, cocoa butter, whole milk powder, cocoa mass, whey powder [from milk], lactose [from milk], emulsifier [322, from soy]), glucose-fructose syrup, sugar, caramelised sugar syrup, raising agents (503, 501, 500), spices, potato starch, salt. Milk chocolate contains 33% cocoa solids and 22% milk solids.	NUTRITION INFORMATION servings per package: 7 (approx.) serving size (3 hearts): 42g (approx.)	
	Average Quantity per Serving	Average Quantity per 100g
Energy	687kj	1635kj
Protein	2.1g	5.1g
Fat, total	3.8g	9.0g
- saturated	2.0g	4.8g
Carbohydrate	27.6g	65.6g
- sugar	14.0g	33.4g
Sodium	Less than 1g	Less than 1g

MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF PEANUTS, OTHER NUTS AND EGGS.

INGREDIENTS: WATER, TOMATO (26%), SUGAR, THICKENER (1422), SALT VEGETABLE, FLAVOUR, WILDFIRE SPICE MIX, BASIL, FOOD ACID (330)		
NUTRITION INFORMATION: Servings Per Pack: 2 Serving Size: 250g		
	Avg Quantity Per Serving	Avg Quantity Per 100g
ENERGY	405kj (95 Cal)	160kj (40 Cal)
PROTEIN	1.0g	<1.0g
FAT - Total	<1.0g	<1.0g
- Saturated	<1.0g	<1.0g
CARBOHYDRATE - Total	22.0g	8.8g
- Sugars	18.1g	7.2g
SODIUM	190mg	75mg

If the label of this tomato soup was correct it would be the lowest sodium soup canned in Australia (other than baby food) at 75mg/100g.

A serving would give a person only 19% of their daily sodium allowance if they were restricted to 1000mg. The manufacturer knew of the problem by July 2005 but I was still able to buy some almost a year later (10/4/06).

Their website showed 475mg/100g. One serve would give 119% of a 1000mg daily allowance.

There is no salt shown and the acidity regulator is citric acid (a non sodium additive) so this may be a low sodium product, but the sodium level of 0.1mg/100g is impossible and casts doubt on the product.

NUTRITION INFORMATION SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: 2 SERVING SIZE: 200g		
	AVG QTY PER SERVING	AVG QTY PER 100g
ENERGY	168kj (40 Cal)	84kj (20 Cal)
PROTEIN	2.2g	1.1g
FAT, TOTAL	0.8g	0.4g
- SATURATED	0.4g	0.2g
CARBOHYDRATE	6.8g	3.4g
- SUGARS	6.8g	3.4g
SODIUM	0.2mg	0.1mg

INGREDIENTS: TOMATOES (60%), TOMATO JUICE, ACIDITY REGULATOR (330).

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION SERVINGS PER PACKAGE: 2.8 SERVING SIZE: 50g		
	AVG. QUANTITY PER SERVE	AVG. QUANTITY PER 100g
ENERGY	158KJ	315KJ
PROTEIN	1.6g	3.1g
FAT - TOTAL	<1.0g	<1.0g
- SATURATED	<1.0g	<1.0g
CARBOHYDRATE	7.2g	14.3g
- SUGARS	4.5g	9.0g
SODIUM	10mg	20mg

INGREDIENTS: TOMATO PASTE 99%, SALT 1%
REFRIGERATE AFTER OPENING

With 1% salt this tomato paste should be 388mg plus some for the actual tomato paste.

A no added salt tomato paste has about 50mg/100g so you would expect 438/100g not the 20mg shown.

Seen later labelled as 420mg/100g.

Cappuccino
we recommend using 150ml of hot but not boiling water

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 10		
Serving size: 12.5g		
Average Quantity	Per Serving	Per 100 ml (as prepared)
Energy	194.37 kJ	129.58 kJ
Protein	1.5 g	1.0 g
Fat, total	0.38 g	0.25 g
- saturated	0.07 g	0.05 g
Carbohydrate	8.87 g	5.91 g
- sugars	8.72 g	5.82 g
Sodium	0.04 mg	0.03 mg

GB / Ingredients: sugar, skimmed milk powder, instant coffee powder, whey powder, glucose syrup solids, vegetable fat, acidity regulator E500 (ii), E450 (i), stabilizer E340 (ii), natural and natural identical flavours, cocoa powder, anti-caking agent E551, artificial flavour. Net. Weight: 100 gram. Energy per 100 gram: Energy: kcal 344, kJ 1438 / Protein: 12 g / Carbohydrates: 63 g / Fat: 4 g

This is a fizzy product and sodium compounds are used to give the fizz. Note that 150ml of water is added and the nutrition information pertains to 100ml of the made up product. This made up product is supposed to have less sodium than the best tap water. The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 2004 (Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council) say that Australian reticulated water supplies have a sodium level of from) 0.3 to 30mg/100g (ml) with 5mg/100g being typical. Other brands show 1000 times this sodium.

Above: Cappuccino Ingredients list on original packet.

Not all sodium levels are understated.
18.2 mmol equates to 418mg of sodium.

Balsamic vinegar is recommended as a flavoursome product for people on low sodium diets.

The importer checked with the manufacturer and the correct value of 33mg/100g will be on new labels.

SERVING SIZE		15 ML	
Quantity per Serving		Quantity per 100 ml	
Energy	kJ	39,77 kJ	278,42
	kcal	9,5 kcal	66,5
Protein	g	0,01 g	0,08
Fat total	g	0,00 g	0,00
saturated	g	0,00 g	0,00
Carbohydrate	g	2,1 g	15
sugars	g	2,1 g	15
Sodium	mmol	2,6 mmol	18,2

Ingredients: Balsamic Vinegar.

INGREDIENTS		
Wheat Flour, Sugar, Margarine, (Animal & Vegetable Oils), Egg, Golden Syrup, Butter (Cream, Water, Salt), Water, Raising Agent (500, 450), Emulsifier (471, 322 Soy Lecithin), Acidity Regulator (500, 330), Ginger (2%), Spices, Salt, Food Acid (330), Antioxidant (320, 310), Colour (160A), Preservative (202, 263), Flavour.		
NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings Per Package: 8		
Serving Size: 25g		
	Per Serving 25g	Per 100g
Energy	385kJ	1540kJ
Protein	1.1g	4.5g
Fat - Total	4.5g	18.2g
- Saturated	2.3g	9.2g
Carbohydrate	11.7mg	47.1g
- Sugars	6.8g	27.5g
Sodium	1mg	6mg

QUANTITIES STATED ABOVE ARE AVERAGES ONLY

Above: Ginger Kisses relabelled later with 586mg/100g.



If the product's only nutrition label is like this on the left, report it for not conforming to the Australian standard.

If you have a spare hour you might try to understand it by looking at this link. <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>

But it is not a good example to try to understand.

How can there be more total fat for a 2000 calorie diet than for a 2500 calorie diet? 3.5g of fibre is not 9.83% of the 25g shown for a 2000 diet.

It looks as though there is no sodium and this may be true. 0% **could** be shown **if** the sodium in a serve was less than 0.5% of the reference diet amount of 2400mg and rounded down to 0%, ie, 12mg/100g serve. However the ingredients show "Butter Beans, Water, **Salt**, Food acid (330)".

This label had the Australian importer's address on it so I presume it was printed specially for Australia. It has obvious mistakes. "Less man" should be "Less than" for a start.

With this sort of quality control, it is hard to trust the sodium level.

I hope the sight of all these incorrectly labelled products has aroused your suspicion about the integrity of Australian nutrition labels. There are many more that just repeat the sorts of problems you can see above. There are bound to be other problems that are not obvious and would only be revealed by a sodium test.

If you have any questions or suggestions please contact me at

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Based on information from the website www.findlowsaltfood.info