

# **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](http://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/](http://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](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/28009.pdf)

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

[users.tpg.com.au/pschamb/sodiumlabadditives.html](http://users.tpg.com.au/pschamb/sodiumlabadditives.html)

## **CHECKING THE SODIUM LINE ON THE NUTRITION PANEL**

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

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

**If** the sodium is not shown as “mg”, report or 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 triple 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. This has 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



| Nutrition Information |                      |                     |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                       | Quantity per 12.5 ml | Quantity per 100 ml |
| Energy                | 101 kJ               | 808 kJ              |
| Protein               | 0.81 g               | 6.5 g               |
| Fat, total            | 0.08 g               | 0.6 g               |
| Carbohydrate total    | 6.04 g               | 48.3 g              |
| Sodium                | 0 mg                 | 0 mg                |

Product of Holland -

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.

| NUTRITION INFORMATION   |                                    |                                 |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| servings per package: 7 (approx.)<br>serving size (3 hearts): 42g (approx.) |                                    |                                 |
|   | Average<br>Quantity<br>per Serving | Average<br>Quantity<br>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                    |

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.

MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF PEANUTS, OTHER NUTS AND EGGS.

| NUTRITION INFORMATION:                     |                             |                          |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Servings Per Pack: 2<br>Serving Size: 250g |                             |                          |
|  | Avg Quantity<br>Per Serving | Avg Quantity<br>Per 100g |
| ENERGY                                     | 405kJ<br>(95 Cal)           | 160kJ<br>(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<br>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.



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

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.

| 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. |                 |          |
| Store Instructions  |                 |          |
| 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.

I have many many more examples.

| Nutrition Facts   |                     |           |         |
|---|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Serving Size 100 grams  |                     |           |         |
| Servings Per Container 3  |                     |           |         |
| Amount per Serving  |                     |           |         |
| Calories 68,5   | Calories from Fat 0 |           |         |
| % Daily Value   |                     |           |         |
| Total Fat   |                     |           |         |
| Saturated Fat 0g  | 1,21 %              |           |         |
| Cholesterol 0mg   | 0 %                 |           |         |
| Sodium  | 0 %                 |           |         |
| Total Carbohydrate  | 0,38 %              |           |         |
| Dietary Fiber 3,5g  | 9,83%               |           |         |
| Sugars 1g   |                     |           |         |
| Protein 4,26g   |                     |           |         |
| Vitamin A %      Vitamin C %  |                     |           |         |
| Calcium %      Iron %   |                     |           |         |
| Percent Daily Values are based on 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs: |                     |           |         |
|   | Calories            | 2,000     | 2,500   |
| Total Fat   | Less man            | 85g       | 80g     |
| Sat Fat   | Less man            | 20g       | 25g     |
| Cholesterol   | Less man            | 300mg     | 300mg   |
| Sodium  | Less man            | 2,400mg   | 2,400mg |
| Total Carbohydrate  |                     | 300g      | 375g    |
| Fiber   |                     | 25g       | 30g     |
| Calories per gram:  |                     |           |         |
| Fat 9   | Carbohydrate 4      | Protein 4 |         |

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

[peter@findlowsaltfood.info](mailto:peter@findlowsaltfood.info)

Peter Chamberlain

Based on information from the website [www.findlowsaltfood.info](http://www.findlowsaltfood.info)