Overview of WHO’s work on sodium reduction and Global Sodium Benchmarks for Processed Foods

Launch event on the WHO global sodium benchmarks for different food categories, 5 May 2021

Dr Rain Yamamoto
Scientist
Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Diet Unit
Department of Nutrition and Food Safety

Dr Chizuru Nishida
Unit Head
Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Diet Unit
Department of Nutrition and Food Safety
Overview of WHO’s work on sodium reduction
**Background of sodium work**

### WHO’s scientific advice & guidance on sodium intake
- **1989** WHO Study Group on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic diseases (TRS 797, 1990)
  → < 6 g/day of **salt**

  → < 5 g/day (sodium chloride) or < 2 g/day (sodium)
  70 – 80 mmol of potassium

  → < 5 g (90 mmol)/day of **salt**

- **2012** WHO guideline on sodium and potassium intake
  (w/ new WHO guideline development process 2011 - 2012)
  - 6 systematic reviews including 1 re-analysis of existing Cochrane review
  → < 2g/day sodium (< 5 g/day salt) in adults

### Political commitment on reducing sodium intake
- **2004**: WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (WHA 57.17)
- **2011**: Political Declaration of the 2nd High Level Meeting on NCDs

### Codex guideline
- **2013**: Additional mandatory nutrients to be declared – sodium, total sugars, SFA (TFA)

### Sodium guideline:

### Potassium guideline:

Target = 30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium towards the WHO recommended level of less than 5g/day (2g/day sodium) for adults
Setting global sodium benchmarks for different food categories

Roundtable on noncommunicable diseases: Co-convened by WHO and Chatham House
Chatham House, London, 26 June 2018

Strengthening the role and contribution of the food & non-alcoholic beverage industry to respond to the 2011 Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs

To achieve the global sodium target (30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium intake by 2025), WHO’s asks to food industry were to implement:

1. **Reformulation of foods** to lower sodium concentrations
   - Adopt standardised targets for sodium levels for food categories that are major contributors to sodium intake in diets and implement them by 2025 (all food industry - manufactured, retail and out of home and food services). A global common set of targets will be established, through a dialogue with WHO.

2. **Sodium content labelling**
   - Provide the on-pack sodium data required by Codex (all food services and manufacturers in every jurisdiction). Food services and restaurant chains should also provide these data in store, on packaging or online.
Global Sodium Benchmarks for Processed Foods
What are the WHO global sodium benchmarks?

• The maximum sodium level that processed food can contain

• Harmonized global goal

• Guide for countries

• Basis for dialogue with industry

• Established for 64 food categories
WHO global sodium benchmarks established for 64 food categories

- Savoury snacks
  - Crackers, savoury biscuits
  - Nuts, seeds and kernels
  - Potato, vegetable and grain chips, extruded snacks, pretzels
- Breakfast cereals
- Granola and cereal type bars
- Nut butters
- Cakes, pies, pancakes, scones, cookies, sweet biscuits
- Processed fruit, vegetables and legumes (7 subcategories)

- Bread and bread products (3 subcategories)
- Cheese (8 subcategories)
- Processed meat products (6 subcategories)
- Tofu and tempeh, meat analogues
- Processed fish products (3 subcategories)

- Ready-made and convenience foods
  - Pizza, sandwiches and wraps
  - Pasta, noodles, and rice with sauce or seasoned
  - Canned foods
  - Soup
  - Ready-to-eat meals

- Sauces, dips and dressings
  - Bouillon, soup stock
  - Dips, dipping sauces, emulsion-based sauces and dressings
  - Cooking sauces, condiments
  - Soy sauce, other Asian-style sauces
  - Butter, margarine and oil-based spreads

etc....
Process for setting the global sodium benchmarks

• Technical consultation
  ▪ 21-23 October, 2020 (Zoom meeting)

• Expert meetings and consultation
  ▪ 19-20 November 2020 (Zoom meeting)
  ▪ 26 January 2021 (Zoom meeting)
  ▪ February – March 2021 (Online platform)
Global benchmarks are based on technical and scientific work and experiences of countries.

- Data on sodium targets were collected and compiled from **41 countries**, **one WHO region and one WHO subregion**, which had developed national and regional targets.

- In principle, the lowest value for each subcategory from existing national or regional targets was chosen as a benchmark value. 
  + case-by-case review

- **Challenging and ambitious targets**
- **Demonstrated feasibility**
Example – **Potato chips/crisps**

Categorized under
- 3. Savoury snacks
  - 3c. Potato, vegetable and grain chips
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main food category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Subcategory description</th>
<th>WHO global Sodium benchmark (mg / 100 g)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a. Crackers/savoury biscuits</td>
<td>Plain (i.e. flavoured only with salt) or flavoured crackers, sandwich crackers, puffed cakes (e.g. cheese crackers, soda crackers and rice cakes). Includes dry breads such as Melba toast, rusk, breadsticks, pita or baguette chips, and other crisp breads. Excludes unsalted products.</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b. Nuts, seeds and kernels</td>
<td>Popcorn, nuts, peanuts and seeds (seasoned with salt or flavour). Excludes unsalted products.</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3c. Potato, vegetable and grain chips</td>
<td>Chips made of potato, vegetables and grains (e.g. corn, wheat, multigrain and rice). Includes all flavours (including salt and vinegar flavours). Includes both reformed chips/crisps and sliced chips.</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3d. Extruded snacks</td>
<td>Sheeted, reformed, puffed or pelleted snacks made from starch-rich materials (e.g. corn, maize, wheat, rice or potato flour) or legume flours. Includes all flavours (including salt and vinegar flavours). Excludes chips (see 3c) and pretzels (3e).</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3e. Pretzels</td>
<td>Salted hard pretzels. Includes sweet and savoury flavoured, filled and unfilled pretzel snacks (e.g. chocolate covered pretzels and pretzels filled with cheese).</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHO global sodium benchmark for potato chips**

= 500 mg sodium / 100g product
WHO global sodium benchmark for potato chips = \textbf{500 mg sodium / 100g product}

Brand A – Sea salt potato chips

Source: https://world.openfoodfacts.org/product/9310988012720/the-natural-chip-co
WHO global sodium benchmark for potato chips = **500 mg sodium / 100g product**

Brand B – Sea salted potato chips

![Image of potato chips]

- **Sodium** = $\frac{1000\text{mg}}{2.5} = 400\text{mg} < 500\text{mg}$

Source: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tyrrells-Sea-Salted-Furrows-Pack/dp/B00AHUESM4](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tyrrells-Sea-Salted-Furrows-Pack/dp/B00AHUESM4)
How was the benchmark value determined?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main food category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Subcategory description</th>
<th>Global benchmark (mg / 100 g)</th>
<th>Lowest target on which the benchmark is based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Savoury snacks</td>
<td>3c. Potato, vegetable and grain chips</td>
<td>Chips made of potato, vegetables and grains (e.g. corn, wheat, multigrain and rice). Includes all flavours (including salt and vinegar flavours). Includes both reformed chips/crisps and sliced chips.</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Australia: Potato snacks, 500 mg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## National targets for 3c. Potato, vegetable and grain chips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Country description</th>
<th>National target (mg/100g)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Australia</td>
<td>Potato snacks</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Colombia</td>
<td>Flavored chips (Papas saborizadas)</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 New Zealand</td>
<td>Potato &amp; other vegetable crisps</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Brazil</td>
<td>French fries - Potato chips (Batata frita/palha)</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 PAHO</td>
<td>Snacks</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 South Africa</td>
<td>Flavoured potato crisps, excluding salt-and-vinegar flavoured potato crisps</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 UK</td>
<td>Standard potato crisps</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Fiji</td>
<td>Corn chips</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Fiji</td>
<td>Other: dalo, cassava chips etc</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Netherlands</td>
<td>Chips - sliced potato: potato chips paprika</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Slovenia</td>
<td>Salty snacks</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 WPRO</td>
<td>Corn chips</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 32 national targets in total for this subcategory.

The Australian target at 500 mg/100g was the **lowest** of all the national targets collected.
Sodium content should be equally low everywhere.

WHO global benchmark = 500 mg/100g product
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Global benchmark (mg / 100g)</th>
<th>Country with the lowest target on which benchmark is based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cookies/sweet biscuits</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>Brazil/AMRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakes and sponges</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers/savoury biscuits</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Paraguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, seeds and kernels</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimally processed breakfast cereals</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly processed breakfast cereals</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh, unripened cheese</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft to medium ripened cheese</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-hard ripened cheese</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed cheese</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned foods</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta, noodles, and rice or grains with sauce or seasoned (dry-mix)</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pizza and pizza snacks</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavened bread</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatbreads</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned fish</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickled vegetables</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofu and tempeh</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat analogues</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condiments</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc....</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

• WHO global sodium benchmarks are the maximum sodium levels that processed food can contain, established for 64 food categories.

• It is a harmonized global goal, which serves as a guide for countries and provides a basis for dialogue with industry.

• They are based on technical and scientific work and experiences of countries, designed to be challenging and ambitious, but demonstrated to be feasible.

• Will enable all countries to benefit from foods lower in sodium and the corresponding health benefits, if implemented.
WHO expectation

• We expect:
  o Countries to adopt the global sodium benchmarks to reduce their populations’ sodium intake.
  o Industry to implement the global sodium benchmarks to cut sodium levels in processed foods.
  o Civil society and consumers to advocate and demand for lower sodium in processed foods.
Acknowledgments

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WHO country office colleagues

Member States and national focal points

WHO Headquarters:

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