

Abstract

# Sodium Content of Processed Meats in New Zealand <sup>†</sup>

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High dietary sodium intake increases blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Processed meats (sausages, bacon, and ham), are a major contributor to dietary sodium intakes in New Zealand. The objectives of this research were to: (1) determine the mean sodium content of processed meats available in New Zealand supermarkets; (2) determine the proportion of processed meat products meeting the voluntary Heart Foundation sodium reformulation maximum targets; (3) compare the sodium content of private label and branded processed meat products; and (4) determine whether there has been a change over time in the sodium content of processed meats. This research utilised NutriSales, an annually updated database of all packaged food and beverage products in four major supermarkets (New World, Countdown, PAK'nSAVE, and Four Square) linked to Nielsen Homescan<sup>®</sup> Consumer Panel data on annual household food purchases. In 2018, for sausages ( $n = 134$ ), bacon ( $n = 96$ ) and hams ( $n = 37$ ), the mean (SD) sodium content was 754 (153), 1037 (228) and 1205 (240) mg/100 g, respectively. When weighted by household purchases (kg), 20% of sausages, 43% of bacon, and 11% of ham products met the current maximum target (650 mg sodium/100 g for sausages, and 1090 mg sodium/100 g for bacon and ham). For sausages, the sodium content of private label products ( $n = 29$ ) was significantly lower than branded products ( $n = 105$ ) 699 (SD = 133) mg/100 g vs. 767 (SD = 155) mg/100 g ( $p = 0.028$ ). From 2013 to 2018, the mean sodium content of sausages reduced from 804 (SD = 187) to 754 (SD = 153) mg/100 g ( $p = 0.025$ ), and bacon from 1144 (SD = 318) to 1037 (SD = 228) mg/100 g ( $p = 0.013$ ). However, there was no significant change for sliced hams. A government-led reformulation programme with progressive targets and consequences for inaction would enable greater change in the food supply.



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