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Meat-free burgers, survey shows

By **Nina Avramova, CNN**

 Updated 1436 GMT (2236 HKT) October 23, 2018

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Meat-free burgers contained more salt than burgers made with real meat

The UK group [Action on Salt](#) found that burgers made from meat substitutes contained an average of 0.89 grams of salt per serving -- real beef burgers' averaged 0.75 grams per portion -- 0.14 grams less.

28% of meat substitute products sold in the UK exceed maximum salt guidelines

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The group, based at Queen Mary University of London, studied 157 meat-free products from major retailers and found that more than a quarter -- 28% -- of meat-free products had higher salt levels than guideline targets set by Public Health England.

In addition, 20% of products did not have color coded labeling on their packaging to reveal the nutritional information of the foods, such as salt levels.

"Labels allow people to just glance at a product, and [see if it is a healthy or less healthy choice](#)," said Mhairi Brown, nutritionist at Action on Salt, who carried out the survey.



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She said the results are quite surprising, given that meat-free options are sold as healthier alternatives to real meat.

"People don't tend to think as meat alternatives as an unhealthy product," said Brown. But this "health halo is concealing quite high levels of salt," she told CNN.

The group have called on Public Health England (PHE) to act now to lower the amount of salt found in these food products.

High salt diets can increase blood pressure and are linked to strokes and cardiovascular diseases. UK [guidelines](#) recommend a maximum daily salt intake for adults of 3 grams to be reached by 2025 to tackle cardiovascular problems in the population.

help us [live for many more years](#) and research also suggests that too much salt can [negatively affect bone health](#) in young girls and postmenopausal women.

"Reducing salt is the most cost-effective measure to reduce the number of people dying or suffering from entirely unnecessary strokes and heart disease," said Graham MacGregor, professor of cardiovascular medicine at Queen Mary University of London and chairman of Action on Salt. "Given the vast amounts of strokes and heart disease that could be avoided and huge savings to the NHS, it is incomprehensible that Public Health England are not doing more to reduce the amount of salt in our food."



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reduce salt intake," she said.



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50% more than the recommended federal guidelines.

Dr. Brian Power, lecturer in nutrition at University College London (UCL) and honorary dietitian at the UCL Hospital, warned that the survey didn't include a baseline or the total number of meat-free products available in the UK, leaving it up for question if the survey's results are an estimate of this entire category of food or if the

Concern for flexitarians

Brown highlighted the recent rise in [flexitarian](#) diets, where meat consumption is kept to a minimum. Health and environmental reasons are the driving forces behind the popularity of this diet. But "if people are making those healthy choices," she asked, "are they really finding healthier [food] choices?"

Reduction of our meat consumption is key to helping the environment and Brown thinks it is important to encourage reduced meat production due to the environmental impacts. But the "food industry should be encouraged to

According to the survey, the saltiest meat-free product was Tofurky's Deli Slices Hickory Smoked, containing 3.5 grams of salt -- approximately 30% more than the salt found in 100 grams of seawater, which is 2.5 grams.

The UK began implementing salt targets in 2006. Since 2016 responsibility was taken up by PHE and Brown stated that "very little action" has been undertaken by the public body.

The last salt target -- 0.63 grams of salt per 100 grams -- published by Public Health England expired in December 2017 and there has been no new target or recommendation published said Brown, adding that her findings show "the food industry hasn't been encouraged to work towards those [salt] targets."

"Our salt consumption has decreased over the last decade but there is still a long way to go, as some foods still contain too much salt," stated Louis Levy, spokesperson for Public Health England, in an email to CNN. The "Government has been clear with the food industry on the importance of meeting the 2017 salt targets. Since taking over salt reduction, PHE has been collecting data on industry's progress and we'll report later this year as planned."

A US Department of Health and Human Services [report](#) earlier this year stated that average sodium intake for American adults is more than 3.4 grams per day. Nearly

findings represent a small part of the meat-free industry.

Power also highlighted that salt intake is just one factor influencing our cardiovascular health. Exercise levels, alcohol consumption and how much water we drink are also important. "There is no good versus bad food, it is more about the pattern over a consistent period of time."