



Breaking News on Food & Beverage Development - North America

Mintel asks whether sodium could be 'the next trans fat'

By Caroline Scott-Thomas, 12-Aug-2009

Mintel has suggested that sodium could be the next trans fat as consumers are increasingly looking to low-sodium options and manufacturers are responding by slicing salt from their products.

According to the USDA, the average American consumes 4000mg of sodium a day, when the maximum recommended daily intake is 2,300mg, or about one teaspoon of salt. But this excessive sodium consumption has been drawn into the spotlight in recent years, as consumers have become more aware of sodium's role in conditions such as hypertension and heart disease, and manufacturers have been under pressure to cut sodium content.

Now, Mintel claims that the low-sodium drive is gaining momentum. According to the market research organization's Global New Products Database, introductions of food products making a low, no or reduced sodium claim increased 115 percent from 2005 to 2008.

Director of consumer insights at Mintel David Lockwood said: *"The rapidly rising evidence in the past several years points out sodium as a major cause of hypertension, osteoporosis, kidney damage and stomach cancer. Because of this scientific knowledge mixed with that of global health activists, there is a climate forming for rapid change. We are starting to see this information set into motion with a reduction in sodium on packaged goods and restaurant menus."*

Monitoring intake

In addition, Mintel says that more than half of consumers are now monitoring the sodium in their diets.

The organization characterizes consumers in four different ways: 34 percent do not pay attention to sodium; 22 restrict the amount of salt that they add to food at the table; 18 percent say that *"food and beverages low in sodium are one of the three most important components of a healthy diet"*; and 26 percent read labels for sodium, and may make some decisions based on that information.

Trans fat

Like the growing body of research that links sodium with cardiovascular disease, evidence mounted over the past decade showing that trans fats raise levels of low-density lipoproteins – so-called 'bad' cholesterol – while also lowering 'good' cholesterol in the body, clogging arteries and causing heart disease. This led the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to issue a regulation which came into effect in 2006 requiring manufacturers to list trans fatty acids on the nutrition panel of foods, providing further motivation for manufacturers to slice trans fats from their products.

Demand for hydrogenated oil products across the US has declined by about 75 percent over the past five years.

Under pressure

However, the challenges for food manufacturers in reducing sodium are often twofold: While salt plays a role in consumer acceptance of a product's taste, it is also functional for many foods, acting as a preservative or as an inhibitor for leavening agents. But considering that about 70 to 80 percent of sodium intake in the US comes from salt added to packaged foods, rather than that which is added at the table, it is likely that manufacturers will feel continued pressure.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest recently hit out at food firms for the salt levels in their foods, as a survey showed that the average sodium content of 528 packaged and restaurant foods stayed essentially the same between 2005 and 2008.

It said the big brand-to-brand differences in numerous categories of foods indicated that some companies *"could easily lower sodium levels and still have perfectly marketable products"*.

Copyright - Unless otherwise stated all contents of this web site are © 2000/2009 - Decision News Media SAS - All Rights Reserved - For permission to reproduce any contents of this web site, please email our Syndication department: [Administration & Finance](#) - Full details for the use of materials on this site can be found in the Terms & Conditions

