

Annual Report

May 2019 – April 2020





Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health (CASSH) is a registered charity dedicated to reducing dietary salt, sugar and calorie consumption to improve the health of populations in the UK and worldwide.

The charity is formed of three research and advocacy groups: **Action on Salt, Action on Sugar** and **World Action on Salt and Health**.



Action on Salt is successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high salt diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of salt in processed foods as well as salt added to cooking, and the table. To date, many supermarkets and food manufacturers have chosen to adopt a policy of gradually reducing the salt content of their products.

Action on Salt is supported by 24 expert scientific members.



Action on Sugar is working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high sugar diet, and bring about a reduction in the amount of sugars in food and drink products. By working to reach a consensus with food manufacturers and Government that there is strong evidence that free sugars are a major cause of obesity and have other adverse health effects, we aim to create sustainable policies and systems that enable reduced free sugars intake.

Action on Sugar is supported by 21 expert advisors.



WASH's mission is to improve the health of populations throughout the world by achieving reductions in salt, sugar and calorie intake. WASH provide resources and expert advice to enable the development and implementation of salt, sugar and calorie reduction programmes worldwide.

WASH are a global network of more than 600 expert members in 100 countries.

CASSH Staff

Prof Graham MacGregor	Chairman, CASSH
Katharine Jenner	Campaign Director, CASSH
Dr Kawther Hashem RNutr	Campaign Manager, Action on Sugar
Sonia Pombo	Campaign Manager, Action on Salt
Mhairi Brown ANutr	Policy & Public Affairs Coordinator, Action on Salt & Action on Sugar / International Programme Lead, WASH
Holly Gabriel RNutr	Nutrition Campaigner, Action on Sugar
Zoe Davies ANutr	Nutritionist, Action on Salt and Action on Sugar
Sheena Bhageerutty ANutr	Assistant Nutritionist, Action on Salt and Action on Sugar
David Clarke	Public Relations Manager

We are pleased to announce that Kawther has completed her PhD on food reformulation, where she explored the effect of reformulation on the sugar content of food and drink products, population sugar intake and health outcomes. Kawther is currently on maternity leave.

We are delighted to have Sheena Bhageerutty join the team as Assistant Nutritionist for Action on Salt and Action on Sugar and we were proud to see Action on Salt's Nutritionist Mhairi promoted to Policy & Public Affairs Coordinator and International Program Lead for WASH.

Action on Salt Members

Trustee	Prof PS Sever	Member	Prof T Lang
Trustee	Prof MR Law	Member	Prof KT Khaw
Member	Prof Sir Nick Wald	Member	Prof FP Cappuccio
Member	Prof P Sleight	Member	Prof J Winkler
Member	Prof WPT James	Member	Prof F He
Member	Prof G Beevers	Member	Dr W Sunman
Member	Prof P Elliott	Member	Mr M Kane
Member	Prof Sir Michael G Marmot	Member	Prof S Capewell
Member	Prof NP Poulter	Member	Prof K McPherson
Member	Prof MEJ Lean	Member	Prof J George
Member	Prof PM Dodson	Member	Prof Christopher Millett

Action on Sugar Advisors

Advisor	Dr Y Freedhoff	Advisor	Prof P James
Advisor	Prof A Rugg-Gunn	Advisor	Prof P Whincup
Advisor	Dr M Rayner	Advisor	Prof S Capewell
Advisor	Prof D Haslam	Advisor	Prof RJ Johnson
Advisor	Prof J Winkler	Advisor	Prof Sir Nick Wald
Advisor	Prof J Cuzick	Advisor	Ms K Jenner
Advisor	Mr M Kane	Advisor	Prof T Lang
Advisor	Prof J Wass	Advisor	Ms M Mwatsama
Advisor	Mr N Rigby	Advisor	Prof R Lustig
Advisor	Prof P Sever	Advisor	Prof Christopher Millett
Advisor	Mr T Fry		

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Welcome

This year has brought us more uncertainty than usual, with the delay of Brexit, a new Prime Minister (seemingly) sceptical of public health intervention, and a snap General Election. Among the delays and inaction, CASSH have continued to work towards improved quality of food through reformulation, and applied pressure to both industry and the Government for necessary action. This year we have used various routes, including our regular product surveys, collaborative work with like-minded NGO's, feeding into government consultations and giving evidence to a Select Committee, all of which is given in more detail below.



With poor diets still the leading cause of death and ill health worldwide, the time for action across government and industry has never been more crucial. The latest instalment of the Global Burden of Disease Study by the Lancet Group, investigating the health effects of our diet using data from 195 countries found that 'suboptimal' diets – i.e. diets with too many unhealthy and not enough healthy elements – were linked to 11 million deaths worldwide in 2017, equivalent to 22% of total deaths. Cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of diet-related deaths (10 million deaths), followed by cancers and type 2 diabetes. In 2017, more than half of diet-related deaths were attributed to:

- Eating too much salt - 3 million deaths
- Not eating enough wholegrains - 3 million deaths
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables - 2 million deaths

An independent report by the outgoing Chief Medical Officer Dame Sally Davies, **Time to Solve Childhood Obesity**, was a poignant reminder of the worrying numbers of children living with obesity, and outlined a suite of measures and actions that must take place if we are to achieve the Government's ambition of halving childhood obesity by 2030.

On a somewhat lighter note, I was honoured to be awarded a CBE in June 2019 as part of the Queen's birthday honours, for services to Cardiovascular Disease. This award is a wonderful recognition that our area of research is saving lives, and will continue to save lives for as long as the food industry and the government continue to support salt reduction.



Professor Graham MacGregor
Chairman of CASSH

Our Year in Summary

9

Surveys of the salt, sugar and excess calorie content of popular food

520

Pieces of media coverage, across TV, radio, national print media and online

2

national awareness weeks, with support from

20

health charities

9

Published research papers

9

Responses to consultations

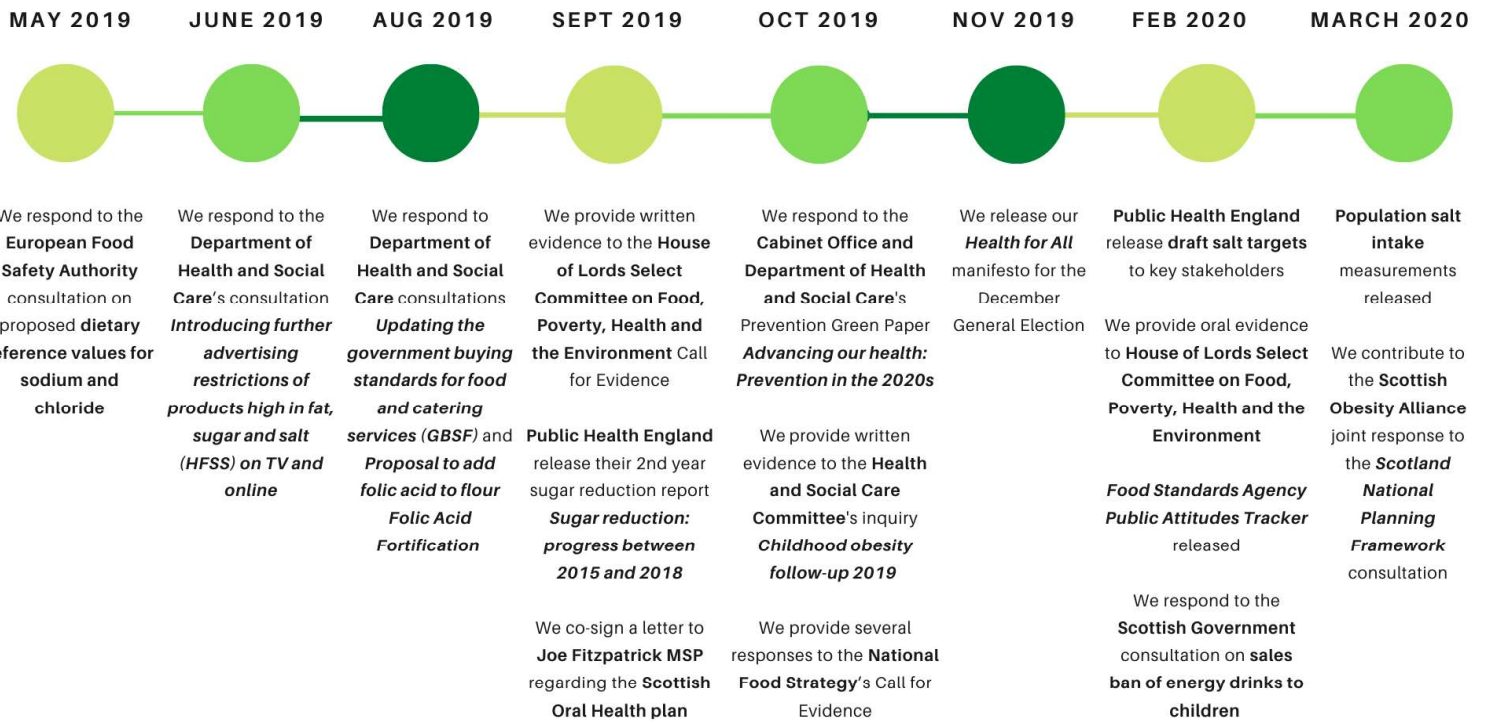
27

meetings with food companies to challenge their progress with salt and sugar reduction

£2.7m

in research grants awarded to us to fund our international salt and sugar reduction work

Policy and Public Affairs Summary



Policy and Public Affairs Highlights

July 2019: Advancing our health - Prevention in the 2020s

In July 2019 the Secretary of State for Health released the long-awaited and overdue **Prevention Green Paper - Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s**. Salt was mentioned as a priority, with new salt reduction targets planned for 2020, to be met by 2023. As part of our consultation response, we submitted a comprehensive **salt reduction plan** - which was endorsed by 15 leading researchers, Blood Pressure UK, the British Heart Foundation and the PKD Charity – to guide the future direction of the salt reduction programme.

In response to the Prevention Green Paper publication, Graham said “While we are pleased to finally see new salt reduction actions in the prevention green paper, we have concerns over the robustness of these proposed plans which suggest that monitoring reports will not be released until 2024, four years following implementation of the new salt reduction targets...It’s imperative the Secretary of State for Health introduces robust and independent target setting, monitoring and enforcement as public health has suffered enough.”

The **third chapter of the Childhood Obesity Plan** was also included within the Green Paper, with measures proposed on infant feeding, clear labelling, food reformulation improving the nutritional content of foods, and support for individuals to achieve and maintain a healthier weight. In addition, there was a ban on the sale of energy drinks to children, and a reiteration that the SDIL would be extended to sugary milk drinks.

September 2019: Public Health England Sugar Reduction Programme: Progress Between 2015 and 2018 report

Public Health England’s overdue second-year progress report revealed an overall 2.9% reduction (sales weighted average sugar per 100g) since 2015. As we expected, a voluntary approach with several allowed methods to achieve a reduction has not achieved the progress required.

In comparison, the mandated Soft Drinks Industry Levy has achieved a 28.8% sugar reduction per 100ml in retailer own and manufacturer branded products since implementation.

This report has helped inform our policy direction over recent months, providing us the data to advocate for a mandatory approach to sugar reduction and the potential success of expanding the levy to milk-based drinks.

Katharine said “Whilst it’s encouraging to learn that both sugary yoghurts and cereals have been successful in the sugar reduction programme proving that reformulation is easily achievable, it is shameful that other manufacturers are dragging their heels and will likely fail to meet the 20% target...”.

September 2019: Letter to Joe Fitzpatrick, MSP

Action on Sugar co-signed a letter to **Joe Fitzpatrick MSP, Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing at The Scottish Government**, along with colleagues at Nourish Scotland, Obesity Action Scotland, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and British Dental Association Scotland. This was in response to news coverage that dental health in Scotland was improving. While this is welcome news we were concerned about the lack of food based guidelines within the Scottish Oral Health plan. As a result, Action on Sugar met with Scottish Government who assured they are endeavouring to make food policies coherent across government whether that be economic, environment, oral health etc. They acknowledged that there was still work to be done and we were assured there is much more work going on as ‘business as usual’ in addition to the areas outlined in the oral health plan. We continue to seek updates in this area.

November 2019: Health for All

In the lead up to the December General Election, it became clear that while every political party had prioritised health, specifically NHS spending

and improving patient treatment, no party had prioritised prevention. Therefore, in November we released our **Health for All** manifesto, detailing our seven-point evidence based plan to prevent ill health in the UK. We distributed this to all political parties which helped pave the way for our public affairs work in early 2020.

February 2020: Food Standards Agency Public Attitudes Tracker Wave 19

The Food Standards Agency published the latest wave of their biannual Public Attitudes Tracker in February, which showed that concerns about the amount of sugar in food is still a top issue for the public and has increased since the previous survey. Other issues of concern were food waste, food prices, animal welfare and the amount of salt in food. Public concern of salt levels in food has been falling over recent years, which is indicative of the need for a renewed public awareness campaign.

February 2020: Draft 2023 Salt Targets Released

February saw Public Health England release a draft proposal of **new salt reduction targets for 2023** to key stakeholders for comment.

Whilst the targets have not been made publicly available, we can confirm that Public Health have proposed a continuation of the existing targets with 2-20% reduction across categories, dependant on category progress, as well as targets for six new categories of food - flavoured nuts, savoury and sweet popcorn, ready meal sides and accompaniments, chilli sauce, dips and all other condiments.

We said *“To ensure protection of public health from a high salt diet, all elements of the UK’s salt reduction programme should be implemented. Given mixed progress with salt reduction in recent years, making salt reduction targets mandatory for the key contributors of salt to the diet i.e. bread, cheese, processed meat, would ensure a level playing field for industry and help bring the out of home sector in line with retail and manufacturers”.*

We welcomed the Government's renewed commitment to salt reduction but knew the targets could go further. Many targets, for example, have remained unchanged since 2017 – this sends the wrong message to industry.

February 2020: Action on Salt & Action on Sugar provide oral evidence to House of Lords Select Committee

As a result of our written evidence submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and Environment inquiry into the links between food and health, in February we were invited to provide oral evidence to the Committee. Mhairi took on this task and presented on a panel with Dr Hilda Mulrooney, representing the Obesity Group of the British Dietetic Association and Kate Halliwell, Head of Diet and Health Policy at the Food and Drink Federation. The session investigated the effectiveness of voluntary versus mandatory health interventions across salt and sugar reduction. [A full transcript of the oral evidence session can be found here.](#)

March 2020: National Diet & Nutrition Survey - Population Salt Intakes

In March 2020, an assessment of salt intake from measurement of urinary sodium in adults in England was published as part of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey. This survey revealed that average intakes are 8.4g/day (a slight but not significant increase from 8g/day in 2014), 40% higher than the maximum recommended intake of 6g/day. This confirms what was unfortunately expected; salt reduction has stalled in the UK.

We said *“This is a direct consequence of a coherent salt reduction programme not being enforced by government and general non-compliance by some of the food industry in recent years.”*

Action on Salt

Surveys looking at the salt content of popular food products were carried out this year, with a particular focus on foods that people may find surprisingly high in salt and perhaps may not consider when thinking about their daily salt intake. Following each of these campaigns, the brands featured negatively were contacted and questioned on their plans for salt reduction. A summary of this activity can be found below.

August 2019 - Savoury Finger Food



We surveyed the salt content of more than 550 savoury picnic foods and found a quarter of the products were high in salt and would have a red label on front of pack. The saltiest olives had 5g of salt per 100g – this is twice as salty as seawater! The saltiest falafel was Gosh! Mediterranean Falafel with Chickpea and Parsley at 1.4g/100g compared to Cauldron Middle Eastern Falafels being 3.5 times less salt at 0.4g/100g. Within a typical picnic, it is possible to consume high levels of salt and saturated fat in one sitting but many of the high salt products had no traffic light nutrition labelling, making it difficult for shoppers to find the healthier option.

Call to action: Immediate compulsory front of pack labelling on all food and drinks, including picnic foods.

Mhairi said *“This survey highlights just how easy it is for consumers to unknowingly eat huge amounts of salt and saturated fat hidden in savoury snacks and picnic favourites...we found a large variation in the salt content of product categories proving reformulation is easily achievable.”*

In response, Fry Family Food said: *Salt levels in our products vary across the range to cater for all customer’s tastes and nutritional requirements, and we have a number of lower salt options available. We have also been working hard to reduce the salt content across our full product range without impacting on taste, and without turning to unnatural flavour enhancers and ingredients.*

Ginsters and Aldi said their products included nutritional information so customers could make informed choices.

Prof Louis Levy, head of nutrition science at PHE: *Voluntary action by industry on salt reduction has helped reduce the nation’s salt intake by 11%, to 8g per day but our review last December shows a mixed bag across products, with only just over half of salt reduction targets met. We all have a role to play in eating a healthier diet, and it is clear that, with the right leadership from industry, further salt reduction in foods is still possible.*

September 2019 - Sauces



To coincide with the **release of a study led by our PhD researcher Monique Tan**, who compared the salt content of sauces in China with similar products sold in the UK, we surveyed more than 350 table sauces, marinades and Asian sauces. Over half were high in salt and would have a red label on front of pack. The tomato sauce with the lowest salt content was Heinz Tomato Ketchup No Added Salt and Sugar with 0.05 per 100g. This has 36 times less salt than their original recipe. Some sauces do not have specified salt targets, and unsurprisingly these were extremely high in salt as there is no expectation for the food industry to reduce the salt content.

Call to action: A comprehensive salt reduction programme in 2020 and for the new targets to cover all categories with added salt.

Sonia said “These sauces are cupboard staples for many of us but we are unknowingly adding vast amounts of salt to our already salty foods. The message to the government is very clear: set robust salt targets for 2020 which will drive reformulation. This should also include mandatory targets for the main contributors of salt in UK diet so that everyone’s health benefits, including the socially deprived.”

In response, AB World Foods said “Our Asian-style sauces and marinades are designed as food ingredients rather than as the main constituent of a meal: on that basis they are used in small quantities to flavour a range of different dishes. All of our products are clearly labelled with nutritional information, including salt content, and are designed to be enjoyed in moderation as part of a balanced diet.”

January 2020 - Bacon



As the second biggest contributor of salt in the UK diet after bread, it may not come as a surprise that bacon is salty. However, the lowest salt bacon we surveyed had four times less salt than the saltiest offenders, showing that lower salt bacon can easily be made. Also surprising to many was that products labelled as 'reduced salt' were actually not the lowest salt products available.

Call to action: Mandatory salt targets and strict penalties for companies that refuse to comply with them.

Zoe said “Whilst it’s great to see a higher uptake of colour coded nutrition labelling, some retailers have completely avoided it or even removed it, and the out of home sector doesn’t use it at all, putting their customers at a disadvantage when looking for healthier alternatives. Government should seize the opportunity of Brexit, and set mandatory colour coded front of pack labelling immediately, to make it easier for customers to choose healthier options.”

Tesco said “The health of our customers is very important to us and we’ve worked hard to reduce salt across our own brand foods. Our Tesco Finest Wiltshire Cure Medallions are a leaner cut of meat, produced to traditional curing methods which make them characteristically higher in salt”.

The British Nutrition Foundation said “The salt content of bacon does vary and so it is technically possible to produce bacon with salt at the lower end of this range, although it should be noted that salt plays a role in the preservation of bacon, and so food safety needs to be considered too...”.

Nick Allen, the Chief Executive of the British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) highlighted that the salt levels on pack are based on declaration, rather than laboratory analysis: “The BMPA is conducting laboratory analysis work to establish what is actually in the bacon and early findings appear to show results at lower levels than the declarations. That said, the variation is unnecessary as are some of the levels and we do believe there is scope to reduce these from where they are now. The reason for the work that we are doing is to identify what is actually being used and then to encourage reduction”.

Following on from the survey, Action on Salt have met with the British Meat Processors Association (BMPA) to discuss salt reduction in bacon.

Salt Awareness Week: 9-15th March 2020

Our annual Salt Awareness Week public awareness campaign is our opportunity to bring attention back to salt, the forgotten killer, and the importance of reducing it to improve our health.

Do you realise just how much salt is hidden in the food you buy every day?



This year's theme was **Hide & Seek**. It's unfair that the food industry is able to 'hide' so much salt in our food and the responsibility for a healthier life falls to the public to 'seek' out lower salt options. In a world where we are increasingly looking for help and guidance in eating a healthier and more sustainable diet, we are still surrounded by salt.

Fittingly, our survey focused on plant-based alternatives in the out of home sector, which has historically lagged behind in progress compared to the retail sector. Plant based and flexitarian diets have been gaining momentum over the last few years and our opinion poll of more than 2,000 adults across the UK found that the main reason people choose vegan and plant-based food was for health improvement, ahead of both environmental and animal welfare reasons.

We surveyed the salt content of plant-based meals available at restaurants and fast food outlets, finding three in five dishes contained more than 3g per portion and 19 dishes contained 6g or more per portion, which is the UK's maximum daily limit. But salt is not the only issue - more than half of restaurant dishes were high in saturated fat.

Call to action: *For the Secretary of State for Health to implement more robust salt reduction targets – with proper enforcement – in order to create a fair and level playing field across both the retail and eating out sectors.*

Sonia said *"Some restaurants are always looking for new ways to produce unhealthy dishes, this time hidden under a vegan health halo, but continuing to drown us in salt and saturated fat just the same. Eating a more plant based diet can and should be beneficial for a number of reasons, but whether you are looking to eat less meat for animal welfare, sustainability or health reasons, it is important to know a 'plant-based' or 'vegan' label does not automatically qualify a product as healthy. It is time for restaurants and cafes to step up and start making food that is healthy for us and better for the planet".*

Papa John's, Loch Fyne and Bella Italia did not respond to requests for comment, but **Wasabi said** *"Wasabi are constantly looking to reduce salt content where possible and are currently developing new vegan dishes with lower salt in mind. Across the extensive Wasabi menu, there are also many dishes which offer a balanced meal."*

Harvester said *"We focus on communicating ingredients, the freshness of our food and providing healthier options, so guests can make an informed choice when eating with us. We share full nutritional information online for guests to access and are very mindful of our role in helping them make knowledgeable decisions about what they eat and drink when visiting our restaurant".*

Blogs & Publications

To coincide with the week, we created content for various magazines and websites, including Food Active, NHD, RSPH and the Sustainable Restaurant Association:

- Mhairi Brown for RSPH: [Guest Blog: Salt Awareness Week 2020](#)

- Zoe Davies for Food Active: [Playing Hide and Seek with Salt this #SaltAwarenessWeek](#)
- Zoe Davies for NHD: [The History of Salt Reduction in the UK](#)
- Sonia Pombo for the Sustainable Restaurant Association Newsletter: [Less Salt, More Flavour!](#)
- Katharine Jenner: [Please don't turn vegan food into junk food](#)
- Roberta Alessandrini: [On salt, ethical veganism, and the challenges of finding healthy food](#)

Panel Discussion & Parliamentary Reception

Our House of Commons reception took place on Wednesday 11th March 2020. The reception was sponsored by Dr James Davies MP and was attended by approximately 40 delegates across different sectors, including the food industry, NGOs and health care professionals, as well as Members of Parliament. The event fell during a level of great uncertainty, with preparations for a national lockdown under consideration due to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Nevertheless, we were fortunate to have a great line-up of speakers, with varied backgrounds and expertise:

- Panel Chair: **Tim Lang** - Professor of Food Policy at City University London
- **Jo Nicholas** - PHE Team Leader for Dietary Improvement
- **Amanda Ursell** - Nutritionist & Consultant
- **Juliet Bouverie** - Chief Executive Stroke Association

Supporters

This year we were fortunate enough to have support from LoSalt, Smart Salt, and 17 national health charities.

Engagement

Our survey generated 40 pieces of media coverage, including five national newspapers and

four radio pieces. On social media, we saw more than 80,000 impressions on Twitter, more than 10,000 impressions on Instagram and 58 page views on our new LinkedIn page.

[We have provided more information about the event and a summary of the speeches on our website](#)



Action on Sugar

We carried out several surveys looking at the sugar and calorie content of popular food products, with a focus on excess calories in sugary food and drinks. Following each of these campaigns, the brands featured were contacted and challenged to improve the overall healthfulness of their products.

August 2019 - Chocolate confectionery



We published a study in the journal *Nutrients* to compare sugar levels in chocolate sold in the UK in 2017 to chocolate sold in 1992, as well as an analysis of calorie levels in chocolate in 2017. We included 23 products in the study which were available in both 1992 and 2017 and found that the average sugar content per 100g for these products increased by 23%.

Call to action: to gradually reformulate chocolate confectionery with less sugar and calories.

Kawther, lead author of the study, said “Excess sugar intake contributes to the high rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay in the UK. It is alarming that sugar levels have risen over time in some well-known chocolate confectionery products. Despite what companies say, clearly reformulation is possible because products were lower in sugar over two decades ago.”

Nestlé commented in *Food Navigator* in 2020 after removing their ‘30% less sugar’ product from the market: “We have learned a lot from this project and developed an even higher performing,

more versatile and affordable sugar reduction technology that will be introduced this year. We’ll also continue to reduce sugar gradually, replacing it with natural ingredients such as fibres, flour, dairy and cocoa powders.”

In the same publication, Holly said: “Had Nestlé used this technology to reduce sugar in its core lines in small increments over time, and without making claims on pack this would have undoubtedly 1) improved consumer acceptance and 2) reduced sugar intake on a population level.....HM Treasury needs to explore further fiscal measures, in addition to the SDIL, to drive reformulation and provide healthier core line products for customers.”

September 2019 - Waffles, Pancakes, Pretzels and Crepes



We surveyed the sugar and calorie content of 191 waffles, pancakes, pretzels and crepes available in restaurants, cafes and takeaways. We commissioned independent laboratory analysis of a sample of the products due to a lack of available nutrition information. Pancakes available from The Breakfast Club had 1800kcal and 53 teaspoons of sugar per serve and a Four Cheese Crepe from My Old Dutch had 1621kcal and 8.5g of salt per serve. These shocking figures come in spite of the inclusion of the products in the Morning Goods Category of Public Health England’s sugar reduction programme.

Call to action: We called for immediate and mandatory calorie and colour-coded nutrition information in the out of home sector.

Kawther said *"It is absurd that supermarkets are forced to be as transparent as possible about what they put in their products, from allergens to calories, but when eating out we often have no idea what is in our food and drink. If companies continue to hide their nutrition information, there is little hope for consumers to find the healthier options. The Health Minister, Matt Hancock MP needs to act now to resolve this unfair situation."*

Kate Oldridge-Turner, Head of Policy & Public Affairs at World Cancer Research Fund, said *"We welcome surveys like this that help the public understand how unhealthy certain products are, and in particular how unregulated certain sectors of the food industry can be. Consumers have the right to know what is in the food they are buying, and will be shocked when they see the large quantities of sugar in some of their favourite products."*

Jonathan, Founder of The Breakfast Club said: *"We'd be delighted to work with Action on Sugar in ways to make the appropriate changes, we're big advocates of healthy eating and we've recently revamped our menu which has just gone 50 per cent vegetarian. For us the important thing is the customer has a choice."*

December 2019 - Festive Hot Drinks



We analysed the sugar and calorie content of festive milk and milk-alternative festive hot drinks available at nationwide high street coffee chains, revealing that certain seasonal beverages contain almost as much sugar as three cans of Coca Cola. For hot chocolate, the worst offender was Starbucks Venti Signature Caramel Hot Chocolate with oat milk, which had 758kcal in a cup and 93.7g of sugar. Starbucks were also top of the list for sugary seasonal lattes, with their Venti

Gingerbread Latte with oat milk containing 523kcal and 56.6g of sugar per serve.

Call to action: *We called for the next government to extend its soft drinks industry levy to sugary milk and milk-alternative based drinks and for the food industry to immediately use milks and syrups with no added sugar.*

Holly said *"It is shocking that so many high street coffee chains are wilfully putting their customers' health at risk despite sugar reduction targets for sugary milk drinks being set in 2018. Responsible coffee shops have shown reformulation is possible within this category. For example, Costa have made some significant reductions in sugar since 2016 and some now offer smaller sizes as standard for seasonal drinks."*

Lorraine Tulloch at Obesity Action Scotland, said *"It is extremely disappointing to see that many high street coffee chains are still failing to reduce sugar in their milk-based and milk-alternative hot drinks...This demonstrates clearly the need for a mandatory approach and we would urge the UK Gov to take steps to include milk-based drinks with added sugar and liquid drink flavourings in the SDIL."*

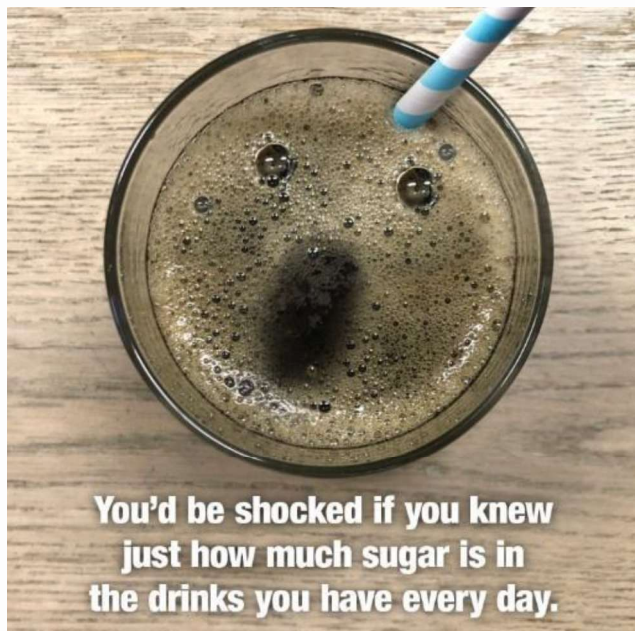
Professor Amelia Lake, Dietitian & Public Health Nutritionist at Teesside University, said *"This is such important awareness raising. As a population we are generally unaware of how much sugar is hidden in our drinks as well as our food...We need to shape our food environment to be healthier to make the healthy choice the norm."*

A Starbucks spokesperson said: *'All our drinks can be customized, such as asking for our smallest size; short, requesting skimmed milk and less or no whipped cream. To help make it easier for customers to make informed choices, nutritional information is also available in-store, on our mobile app and online. 'We are committed to reducing sugar in all our beverages and since 2015, we've delivered a 9% reduction in the sugar content of our Gingerbread and core syrup range of vanilla, caramel and hazelnut.*

Sugar Awareness Week 20th – 26th January 2020

Our annual Sugar Awareness Week aims to raise awareness of the health impacts of consuming excess sugar and calories and to put pressure on the food and drink industry and government to take action.

This year's theme **What's in Your Drink?** gave us an opportunity to highlight the contribution everyday drinks make to sugar and calorie intake, review policy levers currently in place and highlight gaps in policies that are letting the public down. Government currently have several policies in place to help reduce sugar intake across the UK population but sugar-sweetened, ready-to-drink alcoholic drinks have so far avoided scrutiny.



To mark the week, we surveyed popular 'ready to drink' pre-mixed spirits sold in major UK retailers and found them to be unnecessarily high in hidden sugar and calories. We warned that sugary alcoholic drinks are contributing to obesity, type 2 diabetes, various cancers, liver damage and tooth decay as consumers are unknowingly drinking large amounts of sugar and calories. Aside from the health risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption itself, alcohol contains seven calories per gram, and many alcoholic drinks also contain added sugar and contribute further to calorie intake.

Alongside the survey we conducted a nationwide consumer poll of 2,022 UK adults which revealed:

- Almost half (47.4%) of respondents are NOT aware how much sugar is in alcoholic drinks
- Three in four (76.4%) people think alcoholic drinks SHOULD have nutrition information displayed on the bottle / can
- Three in four (75%) people SUPPORT THE CALL for the alcohol industry to reduce sugar in their beverages

Call to action: *To reformulate immediately to the agreed criterion set by the government in the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL). We urged the government to prove it really is committed to prevention and reducing inequalities, by stepping in and taking control of not only the food and drink industries, but also the alcohol industry.*

Katharine said "Gin in a tin' has become a cultural phenomenon with these types of drinks often consumed 'on the go' and without a moment's consideration to how much sugar and alcohol goes into making them. Even if you did want to know, you can't make a healthy choice as only one in ten of the products surveyed had enough information available. If consumers knew how much sugar was really in these drinks, would they still happily choose to drink their way to tooth decay, obesity and type 2 diabetes?"

Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance said: *"Consumers have the right to know exactly what they are drinking. This latest research demonstrates - once again - that the current system of the self-regulation of alcohol labelling isn't working and the industry is not taking its responsibilities seriously... We urge the Government to introduce mandatory labelling on alcohol products in order to give all of us easy access to the information needed to make healthier choices."*

Blogs & Publications

We wrote several blogs to highlight the week for Food Active, RSPH and the Obesity Health Alliance.

- Holly Gabriel @Action on Sugar for Food Active: Guest Blog: Supporting this year's #SugarAwarenessWeek! (January 20th)
- Mhairi Brown @Action on Sugar for Obesity Health Alliance: Sweet or Sour? Are sugar reduction efforts working? (January 20th)
- Holly Gabriel @Action on Sugar for RSPH: Guest blog: Taking action on sugar (21st January)

Panel Discussion & Parliamentary Reception

We held a Reception and panel discussion at the House of Commons Terrace Pavilion on Wednesday 22nd January 2020 to mark Sugar Awareness Week. The reception was sponsored by Andrew Selous MP and was very well attended with 130 delegates across all sectors including the food and drink industry, NGOs and health care professionals, as well as Members of Parliament. We were fortunate to have a great line-up of speakers, with varied backgrounds and expertise, who each gave their perspective on our discussion.

Our panel guests were:

- **Panel Moderator: Tanya Haffner MD RD MBDA, Director at Nutrilicious and**



Registered Dietitian

- **Andrew Selous, Member of Parliament for SW Bedfordshire**
- **Katherine Severi, Chief Executive, Institute of Alcohol Studies**
- **Prof Graham MacGregor, Chair of Action of Sugar**

We made the decision to have no industry exhibitors or sponsorship this year, and instead had poseur tables hosted by supporting NGOs Barts Community Smiles, Food Foundation, British

Dietetic Association, Association for Nutrition, Share Action and Sugar Smart. Each NGO was encouraged to provide a thought-provoking question for discussion, to generate interaction between guests

Supporters

This year we were fortunate enough to have support from public figures including Davina McCall, Hugh Fearnely-Whitingstall and Simon Stevens, and 20 national health charities.



Engagement

We received more than 58 pieces of national and international coverage including BBC Scotland, BBC, Sky Radio and five national newspaper articles. On social media, we received more than 280,000 impressions on Twitter (the total number of times that all posts and stories have been seen), a 111% increase from the previous Sugar Awareness Week, and gained 295 followers. This was our first year posting about Sugar Awareness Week on our Instagram account, we received nearly 7,000 impressions and gained 157 followers. On Facebook we gained 69 followers and our posts reached nearly 11,000 unique viewers.

CASSH Projects

June 2019 - Cartoon Characters on Children's Food Packaging



Action on Salt and **Action on Sugar** in association with the **Children's Food Campaign**, found half (51%) of 526 food and drink products which use cartoon animations on pack to appeal to children are unnecessarily high in fat, saturated fat, sugar and/or salt, and would not be eligible to advertise on TV during children's programmes.

Call to action: *Together with First Steps Nutrition and Living Loud, we called for a complete ban of such marketing tactics on unhealthy products and for compulsory 'traffic light' nutrition labelling, giving parents the chance to make healthier choices.*

Kawther said *"It's shocking that companies are exploiting the health of our children by using cartoon characters on their high sugar food and drink products, particularly on chocolates and sweets, which are already hard to resist for children. Do we really need to entice children to want these products more and pester their parents to buy them? It is time for regulation to curtail the industry's unhealthy habits."*

Dr Max Davie from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) said *'Using cartoon characters on food packaging makes products highly attractive to children. It is irresponsible and exploitative of companies to use such manipulative marketing techniques'.*

Food & Drink Federation Chief Operating Officer Tim Rycroft: *"Food & Drink companies have a legal obligation to tell their customers what is in their food. Ingredients lists and nutrition information are both clearly provided on pack. Many go much further by voluntarily providing a simplified version of the nutrition information on the front of pack – often with red, amber and green colour coding. This means consumers can easily check, compare and choose foods. We agree more needs to be done to tackle obesity."*

Various retailers have since removed cartoon characters from their cereals, including Lidl, Aldi and ASDA. The survey enabled us to expand our engagement with Nickelodeon, Entertainment One and Disney, to discuss their Corporate Social Responsibility, and influence their strategy moving forwards.

August 2019 - Energy Density Levy



Action on Sugar and **Action on Salt** called on the government to introduce a calorie (energy density) levy on all calorie dense processed foods. Similar to the successful Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL), manufacturers would need to pay a levy to the government if they fail to reduce excess calories (energy) in their processed unhealthy foods. This would encourage product reformulation to reduce both fat, in particular saturated fat, as well as sugar in unhealthy products.

Katharine said *"If the government is really committed to helping the less well off, they need to tackle the food industry and a feasibility study needs to be undertaken without delay. An 'excess calorie levy' would encourage manufacturers to improve the nutritional quality of their unhealthy foods and most importantly, tackle the thousands who suffer the consequences of a poor diet, leading to obesity, Type 2 diabetes and cancer."*

Professor He said: “Our School-EduSalt study demonstrated that children have a vital role to play in helping their family make healthier choices. This grant will help us understand how to scale up the school-based education programme, which in the long run could help China achieve a 30% reduction in population salt intake, in line with the World Health Organisation’s guidelines. This will have enormous benefits for health and the economy.”

Malaysia

In early 2020, Professor He and Professor Graham were awarded £148, 972 by the MRC and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) for a project in Malaysia, in collaboration with:

- **Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia**
- **University of Malaya**
- **Sunway University**
- **University Ministry of Health Malaysia**

The funding will be used to develop a policy to reduce the salt content of food consumed outside the home in Malaysia. This project is a continuation of our previous work in Malaysia - **Population-based salt intake survey to support**

the national salt reduction programme for Malaysia - which revealed that food eaten outside the home (from restaurants or street food vendors) is a major contributor of salt to the Malaysian diet. The majority of the population eat outside the home regularly and while the salt content of those meals is likely to be high, without nutrition information at the point of sale, it is difficult for consumers to monitor how much they eat.

Our new funding will enable us to

- Interview 285 stakeholders across the country to determine barriers to salt reduction
- Use this data to develop a strategy
- Gain commitment from policy makers to implement our strategy as policy
- Organise workshops to explain to chefs and other food industry representatives why salt should be reduced, and the methods they can use to reduce salt in food.

This project will run for 18 months, from May 2020 to November 2021.



World Salt Awareness Week

Mirroring the UK campaign, this year's theme was Hide and Seek. More than 15 countries took part in World Salt Awareness Week, and as a result the campaign received coverage through print, social media, TV and radio around the world. However, due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many WASH members were unable to hold public events as they usually would which reduced engagement.

Posters and social media images were translated into 6 languages for use by members in their country campaigns. To mark the week in Peru, Mhairi was also invited to present virtually by the Centre of Excellence in Chronic Diseases (CRONICAS) on the need for advocacy and leadership to ensure success with salt reduction to a group of researchers, medical professionals, policy makers and the public.

Вы осознаете, сколько соли спрятано в еде, которую вы покупаете каждый день?



Do you realise just how much salt is hidden in the food you buy every day?

¿Sabes cuánta sal se esconde en la comida que compras todos los días?



Sapresti dire quanta sale si nasconde negli alimenti che consumi ogni giorno?



Qui se cache le sel dans les aliments de votre quotidien?



Devero tanto? L'industria alimentare e tutti coloro che producono e vendono alimenti aggiungono sale ad alimenti come il pane, i salumi, i dolci e perfino nei cereali da colazione. Siamo in una vera e propria emergenza sanitaria dovuta all'eccessivo consumo di sale che si nasconde in quasi ogni alimento.

SETTIMANA PER LA RIDUZIONE DEL CONSUMO DI SALE 9-15 MARZO 2020
#meno sale più salute worldactiononsalt.com

A truly shocking amount, actually. Food companies add salt to bread, cheese, processed meat, cakes, even breakfast cereal. Little wonder we have a huge salt-related health crisis hiding right in front of our noses.

SALT AWARENESS WEEK 9-15 MARCH 2020
#SaltAwarenessWeek worldactiononsalt.com

La industria alimentaria agregan sal a los cereales para el desayuno, en crisis de salud relacionada con la sal.

AL 9 AL 15 DE MARZO DE 2020
#WorldActionOnSalt worldactiononsalt.com



Une quantité vraiment choquante, en réalité. L'industrie alimentaire ajoute du sel au pain, aux biscuits, à la charcuterie, aux condiments, aux sauces, ainsi qu'aux quiches et aux pizzas. Pas étonnant qu'on ait une crise de santé publique due au sel qui se passe sous notre nez.

SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION AU SEL, DU 9 AU 15 MARS 2020
#SemaineSensibilisationSel worldactiononsalt.com

Our Research

May 2019

Reformulation and Priorities for Reducing Energy Density; Results from a Cross-Sectional Survey on Fat Content in Pre-Packed Cakes and Biscuits Sold in British Supermarkets

The Action on Sugar team, led by PhD researcher Roberta Alessandrini, conducted a cross-sectional survey of the fat content of cakes and biscuits available in nine UK supermarket chains. Total and saturated fat content was positively correlated with energy density. Fat reformulation in these products would effectively reduce energy density, calorie intake and help prevent obesity. Fat reformulation should be implemented simultaneously with sugar reformulation and be focused on saturated fat, as this will have the additional effect of lowering LDL cholesterol.

[Alessandrini, R.; He, F.J.; Hashem, K.M.; Tan, M.; MacGregor, G.A. Reformulation and Priorities for Reducing Energy Density; Results from a Cross-Sectional Survey on Fat Content in Pre-Packed Cakes and Biscuits Sold in British Supermarkets. *Nutrients* 2019, 11, 1216.](#)

July 2019

Twenty-Four-Hour Urinary Sodium and Potassium Excretion in China: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

A systematic review and meta-analysis, published in the Journal of the American Heart Association and led by the WASH team, confirmed that salt intake in China is among the highest in the world, with adults over the past four decades consistently consuming on average 11.2g per day. The authors also reviewed potassium intake and found, unsurprisingly, that potassium intake has been consistently low throughout China for the past four decades and always less than half of the recommended intake.

[Tan M, He FJ, Wang C, MacGregor GA. Twenty-Four-Hour Urinary Sodium and Potassium Excretion in China: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of the American Heart Association* 2019, 8, 14.](#)

August 2019

Reducing population salt intake—An update on latest evidence and global action

The commentary, led by the WASH team and published in the Journal of Clinical Hypertension, discusses the current evidence of the effect of salt on cardiovascular disease and blood pressure, with an update on global salt reduction initiatives. Initiatives to reduce salt should be a gradual approach, as recommended by the World Health Organisation, which still proves to be an effective strategy to reduce the cases of CVD globally.

[He FJ, Brown M, Tan M, MacGregor GA. Reducing population salt intake – An update on latest evidence and global action. *Journal of Clinical Hypertension* 2019, 21:1596–1601](#)

Cross-Sectional Survey of the Amount of Sugar and Energy in Chocolate Confectionery Sold in the UK in 1992 and 2017

A study published in the journal *Nutrients* compared the sugar (1992, 2017) and energy (2017) content of chocolate confectionery available in the UK between 1992 and 2017. There were 23 products found in both 1992 and 2017. The average sugar content per 100 g for these products increased by 23%. The study suggested sugar levels can be reduced because (a) lower sugar versions of the same products existed in 1992 and (b) there is a large variation in sugar and energy content between different categories of chocolate and within the same category in 2017.

[Hashem KM, He FJ, et al. Cross-Sectional Survey of the Amount of Sugar and Energy in Chocolate Confectionery Sold in the UK in 1992 and 2017. *Nutrients* 2019, 11\(8\), 1798](#)

September 2019

Salt content of sauces in the UK and China: cross-sectional surveys

Authors from Queen Mary University of London and The George Institute China published a study in the *BMJ Open* which analysed the salt content of sauces sold in the UK and China. The study found the salt content of sauces sold in China are, on average, 4.4 times more salty than similar sauces in the UK. Around 70% of sauces surveyed in the UK met the UK's 2017 salt targets and over

the past ten years there have been large reductions in salt content to meet those targets. If the same targets were applied to Chinese products, just 13.4% of sauces surveyed would meet them.

[Tan M, He FJ, Ding J, Li Y, Zhang P, MacGregor GA. Salt content of sauces in the UK and China: Cross-sectional surveys. *BMJ Open* 2019, 9:e025623](#)

December 2019

Labelling changes in response to a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Research published by the Action on Sugar team in the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation assessed changes in sugar and energy content of sugar-sweetened drinks sold in the UK before (May 2014) and after (April 2018) the Soft Drinks Industry Levy was implemented. Of the 83 products still on sale in 2018, mean sugar content had decreased by 42%, from 9.1 g/100mL to 5.3 g/100mL.

[Hashem KM, He FJ, MacGregor GA. Labelling changes in response to a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. *Bull World Health Organ.* 2019 Dec 1;97\(12\):818-827.](#)

February 2020

Salt Reduction to Prevent Hypertension and Cardiovascular Disease

A review by WASH members and researchers at Queen Mary University of London was published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC). This review looked at almost 200 published studies and covers not only the mechanisms whereby salt puts up blood pressure, but also other potential mechanisms by which salt can damage our health, including the immune response, gut microbiome, damage to small vessels and brain leading to dementia. The review also highlights the cost-effectiveness of salt reduction and the benefits to health, which are similar to tobacco reduction or prevention of obesity.

[He FJ, Tan M, Ma Y, MacGregor GA. Salt Reduction to Prevent Hypertension and Cardiovascular Disease. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* 2020, 75 \(6\): 632-647](#)

Effect of dose and duration of reduction in dietary sodium on blood pressure levels: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials

A meta-analysis by WASH members and researchers at Queen Mary University of London and The George Institute for Global Health, published in the BMJ, included 133 randomised trials with 12,197 individuals looking at the effect of salt reduction on blood pressure, and showed that salt reduction lowered blood pressure across the whole population, including those with blood pressure within normal ranges. Furthermore, the greater the reduction in salt intake, the greater the fall in blood pressure. The study also showed that people who are older, have higher blood pressure, or of black ethnicity, had an even bigger fall in blood pressure for a given reduction in salt intake, with longer term reductions likely to have a greater effect.

[Huang L, Trieu K, Yoshimura S, Neal B, Woodward M, Campbell NRC et al. Effect of dose and duration of reduction in dietary sodium on blood pressure levels: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials *BMJ* 2020; 368 :m315](#)

March 2020

Nutrition Profile of Products with Cartoon Animations on the Packaging: A UK Cross-Sectional Survey of Foods and Drinks

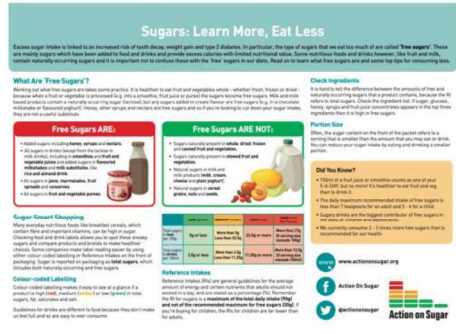
Our cross-sectional survey of products featuring cartoon animations on packaging was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Nutrients*. The study investigated the nutritional quality of UK food and drink products featuring child-friendly characters on pack, finding that more than half (51%) of the 532 products with animations on packaging surveyed were high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS). Food products featuring unlicensed characters were significantly more likely to be deemed HFSS than those with licensed characters, according to both the nutrient profiling model and front of pack nutrition labelling system.

[Pombo-Rodrigues S, Hashem, KM, Tan, M, Davies, Z, He, FJ, MacGregor, GA. Nutrition Profile of Products with Cartoon Animations on the Packaging: A UK Cross-Sectional Survey of Foods and Drinks. *Nutrients* 2020, 12, 707](#)

Resources

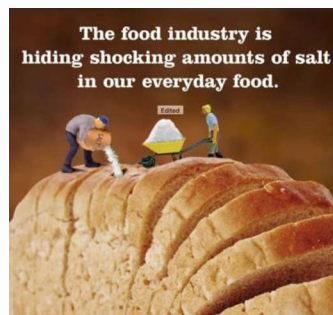
Leaflets and Websites

We continue to educate on the importance of salt and sugar reduction through dedicated pages on our websites and through our resources which can be downloaded for free. To enable local events in support of our Salt & Sugar Awareness Weeks, we provide a free resource pack and this year we distributed more than 600 resource packs for both salt and sugar related local events.



Social Media

We have created some engaging artwork and social media tiles to complement our surveys and Awareness Weeks. We thank **Libertine** for their continued support in creating some of this artwork for us.



FoodSwitch

We continue to collaborate with The George Institute for Global Health on the [FoodSwitch UK](#) app which allows consumers to scan the barcodes of food and drink products and instantly see whether they are high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in fat, saturates, sugars and salt. It also searches the database for similar but healthier alternative products, making it easier than ever to switch to healthier food choices.

The FoodSwitch product database is used for all of our campaign surveys, and as a result we have established ourselves as an evidence-based research partner within the NGO community with access to vital data to track both the salt and sugar reduction programmes.

Newsletter

Our quarterly newsletter, reinstated in December 2018, covers our outputs across both salt and sugar, relevant external news stories and policy announcements. Our distribution list continues to grow and includes NGOs, the general public and food industry representatives.

Building Relationships

To stay at forefront of prevention in the UK and worldwide, we have prioritised the development of mutually beneficial alliances with other health charities and organisations. Working collaboratively or alongside other health charities, Action on Salt, Action on Sugar and WASH offer comments on health related media in support of our colleagues, act as co-signatories on campaigning materials and attend numerous meetings, webinars and conferences around the world.

Over the past year, we have worked with:

Adopt a School	Dental Wellness Trust	Obesity Health Alliance
Alcohol Change UK	Department of Health and Social Care	Oral Health Foundation
Alcohol Focus Scotland	Diabetes UK	Pan American Health Organisation
American Heart Association	European Salt Action Network	Polycystic Kidney Disease
Association for the Study of Obesity	Faculty of General Dental Practice	Public Health England
Barts Community Smiles	Faculty of Public Health	Real Bread Campaign
Blood Pressure UK	Food Active	Resolve to Save Lives
Breast Cancer UK	Food Ethics Council	Royal Academy of Culinary Arts
British Dental Association Scotland	The Food Foundation	Royal College of Nursing
British Dietetic Association	The George Institute	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow
British Heart Foundation	The George Institute for Global Health	Royal Society for Public Health
Cancer Research UK	Heart UK	Scottish Obesity Alliance
The Caroline Walker Trust	Heart Research UK	ShareAction
Center for Science in the Public Interest	Institute of Alcohol Studies	Soil Association
Chefs in Schools	Jamie Oliver Foundation	Sugar Smart
Child Growth Foundation	Kidney Research UK	Sunway University, Malaysia
Children's Food Campaign	Libertine	Sustain
China National Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment	Living Loud	Sustainable Restaurant Association
Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention	Meniere's Society	Stroke Association
Chinese Centre for Health Education	Ministry of Health Malaysia	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Consumers International	National Obesity Forum	University of Malaya
CRONICAS Peru	Nourish Scotland	Which?
	Nutrilicious	World Health Organization
	Obesity Action Scotland	World Cancer Research Fund

COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak is affecting us all, globally. A novel coronavirus - a completely new disease with little known about it, but evidence is growing by the day, along with hopes for a vaccine. Some groups of people appear to be at greater risk of developing complications, and evidence suggests obesity and related health conditions is a risk factor for worse outcomes for COVID-19.

The priority for everyone is to stay safe and well, but we can't forget the importance of good nutrition, especially as we are moving less, finding less food on the supermarket shelves and the rise in delivery services promoting unhealthy options.

In response and to gather all the relevant information we created a [webpage](#) dedicated to COVID-19 to help us navigate the new normal. **Holly** also wrote a blog to address these uncertain times: [COVID-19 and the New Normal \(April 20th\)](#)

Funding

Thank you to the following funders for their support of our UK and international projects this year:



Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health
Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine
Queen Mary University of London
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