

Reformulation Case-Study: Unilever

Challenge: Reducing Salt

Unilever: More Taste with Less Salt

Article adapted from [Unilever](#)

Most people agree that salt makes food taste better. It also plays an important role in preserving food. Small amounts of salt (sodium) in the diet are essential, but too much can lead to raised blood pressure. Worldwide, more than one in five adults has blood pressure that is too high. This leads to increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Overcoming Challenges

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a daily intake of no more than 5g of salt. But around the world the average person eats 9–12g a day, roughly twice the recommended amount. In Europe and North America, approximately 75% of our salt intake comes from processed foods, whereas in developing countries much of the salt is added during cooking or at the table. Lowering salt consumption to the recommended level could save an estimated 2.5 million lives each year.

Unilever has been in the works of reducing salt levels in its products using a number of approaches including cutting salt and complementing that with aromas, spices and herbs can enhance the salty taste and flavour and make products more nutritious.

Salt substitutes like potassium salt are also incorporated in the company's efforts to reduce salt. Potassium occurs naturally in milk, fruit, vegetables and grains, and increased intakes of potassium are encouraged in dietary guidelines. A recent review by Unilever found that replacing sodium with potassium would significantly increase potassium intakes towards recommended daily amounts, without exceeding safety guidelines. To support the safe usage of salt replacers such as potassium salt, it is important that such replacers are accepted by regulatory bodies.

Achievements

By 2017, Unilever had offered a broad range of products that were lower in salt, across markets. As our largest food brand, reformulating salt in Knorr products led to a huge impact.

In Turkey, four key Knorr Meal Makers with up to 38% less sodium was launched; while in South America, an average of 15% of salt was reduced in 14 varieties of Knorr Quick Soups, and by an average 40% in Knorr reduced sodium cubes.

Similarly, in India, over half of Knorr Cup-a-Soup variants now meet sodium benchmarks consistent with WHO recommended salt intakes. Across Europe, 38 recipes under the brand were renovated, reducing salt by an average 8%, removing 33 tonnes from consumers' diets every year.

Unilever Food Solutions (UFS) is delighting consumers eating out of the home, with tasty dishes containing less salt. For example, in Russia, 77% of UFS products are now compliant with our Highest Nutritional Standards. In Turkey, two popular dressings are now on the shelves with reduced salt: Hellmann's ketchup (by 37%) and Hellmann's BBQ sauce (15%). And in India, eight varieties of Knorr Chef's Masala, which meet sodium HNS benchmarks has been launched.

To promote reduced salt options to consumers and to help facilitate their purchase decisions, Unilever displays logos and/or claims such as the Knorr in Brazil which displays the claim 'Same great Knorr taste with 25% less sodium', and in Turkey, Unilever Food Solutions Meal Makers display a 'no added salt' logo.

Additionally, Unilever also provides a salt calculator, online to help people calculate their salt intake, this tool which is available in 12 countries since 2014 guide consumers by informing them which foods contribute the most salt to their diet, encouraging them to make simple changes in their food choices.

Next Steps

Unilever strives to improve the taste and nutritional qualities of all of its product by 2020, doubling the proportion of its global portfolio meeting the highest nutrition standards, based on globally recognised guidelines.

Apart from its salt reduction efforts, a supportive external environment is required to create consumer awareness, specific taste preferences and collaboration between the different players. Previous behaviour-change experiences (such as the salt calculator tool) have proven that a properly funded, multi-faceted approach is essential for success.