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Monitoring salt reduction in processed foods in Australia

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**Background** – Australians are currently consuming around 9g of salt each day, well above the recommended 6 g per day maximum. The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) seeks to improve the health of the Australian population by achieving a gradual reduction in dietary salt intakes. AWASH is working with the food industry to reduce the sodium content of packaged foods by an average 25% over the next five years. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) in the UK is a world leader in salt reduction and has set salt targets for various processed food products. There are currently no such targets for the Australian food industry.

**Objective** – To determine the extent to which processed foods on Australian supermarket shelves meet acceptable sodium levels (based on UK FSA targets).

**Design** – The sodium content of foods contributing substantial amounts of salt to the Australian diet was collected. The mean and range of sodium (in mg/100g) was assessed for each food category and the percentage of products meeting acceptable sodium targets was calculated.

**Outcomes** – Food categories with less than 50% of products meeting sodium targets included bread, processed meat, baked beans, canned vegetables and table sauces. Less than 5% of sausages and beef burgers met acceptable levels. Food categories with more than 50% of products meeting targets included canned fish, butter/margarine, savoury biscuits and some breakfast cereals.

**Conclusion** – Although a number of food companies in Australia have made progress in salt reduction, these results show there is still work to be done. Government should lead negotiations on setting maximum salt targets for different food products.