

TIPS FOR ENGAGING THE FOOD INDUSTRY TO REDUCE SALT IN FOODS

1. MOTIVATE INDUSTRY TO TAKE ACTION

- **Ensure that you present a strong evidence base for salt reduction** – reference relevant national and international documents and make sure that you stay up to date with new information
- **Indicate the importance of the issue and what your overall aim is** – for example publish a clear statement about what you want to achieve and why and highlight stakeholders that are already supporting you
- **Highlight the costs and benefits** – collate and share statistics on incidence of relevant health problems and the amount of money spent addressing these issues
- **Understand the costs to industry** – be aware that industry will raise this but that many of the costs they might encounter related to salt reduction, such as product reformulations or changes to labelling, are costs that they would encounter anyway.
- **Implement strategies to address potential costs to industry** – devising and possibly funding pre-competitive research to address technical barriers to reducing salt; setting targets that are consistent with other countries; aligning timing and goals of salt reduction with other public health initiatives, such as reformulation to reduce fat or labelling initiatives; reassess costs as program develops.
- **Stimulate demand for reduced salt foods** – raise consumer awareness of the problem of eating too much salt and provide information about what consumers can do, including by providing information on which foods are higher/lower in salt. Increased demand will help to drive further industry action.
- **Ensure companies obtain recognition** – publically praise achievements and obtain high level endorsement of industry actions through Ministerial speeches and recognition through international forums such as the EU Salt Action Network
- **Introduce labelling initiatives that support reduced salt products** – front of pack labels such as the UK traffic light or the Swedish Keyhole scheme or warnings such as those used in Finland, can help drive food industry reformulation
- **Highlight the fact that companies have a Corporate Social Responsibility to protect health** – this can include by helping customers and employers to eat a healthier diet for example by reducing salt in foods.

2. IDENTIFY KEY PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS TO WORK WITH

- **Map out relevant companies** including manufacturers, retailers and food service companies and the trade associations that represent them
- **Establish the key foods that contribute to salt in the diet** – this information can usually be obtained from recent dietary surveys and food composition data
- **Focus particularly on larger companies** or those with relatively large market share of the products that contribute significantly to salt in the diet
- **Meet with as many companies and trade associations as you can** to find out what they can and are prepared to contribute to the program of work
- **Identify key personnel within each company** – whilst the company nutritionist may seem like an obvious point of contact they don't always have the power to make changes so make sure that you involve senior staff such as the CEO, Director of Corporate Affairs, Product Managers and Communications or Marketing staff in the initial meetings prior to establishing your key contact person.

- ***Establish a database of company contacts*** – this can help you keep track of the companies that you have met with and the names of relevant people but is also a useful mailing list for future communications.
- ***Outline clear objectives for each meeting and go prepared*** – establish whether the meeting is a ‘meet and greet’ or to obtain feedback or discuss progress. Prepare relevant information in advance such as data showing how the salt levels in a company’s products compares with the rest of the market.
- ***Hold a variety of different types of meetings*** – whilst one-on-one meetings with individual companies will be useful at the outset, it is also good to have product sector (e.g. bread or processed meats) specific meetings or meetings with trade associations.
- ***Facilitate the establishment of partnerships*** – partnerships can be used to develop cross-sectoral agreements and targets and to report progress
- ***Maintain good records of meetings*** – this is helpful to remind people what was agreed as well as recording agreed actions. It is important to consider whether information may be confidential before recording it and sharing it.
- ***Establish mechanism for engaging with small businesses*** – small businesses may not be members of trade associations so communicating with them may be more challenging plus they may have limited capacity to make changes. It may be worth considering a guidance note for small businesses that you can then communicate as widely as possible.

3. DISCUSSIONS WITH INDUSTRY

- ***Be as open and honest as you can*** – the more you can share the more they will share and it is important to build up trust and understanding
- ***Seek a variety of views and consider independent advice*** – whilst it is important to listen and take account of different views, don’t be immediately influenced by the comments from one organisation, particularly on the viability of making reductions, as there are several reasons why companies may want to present barriers.
- ***Seek out salt champions*** - identify progressive companies that are positive about the potential for reductions, highlight their achievements and make them salt champions.
- ***Understand that companies may not always be able to share information*** – this may be because it is commercial in confidence or because they simply don’t know yet!
- ***Build and maintain relationships with individual companies*** – recognise that a range of factors will influence their progress and try and work with them to overcome barriers
- ***Combine visits to companies with visits to factories*** – this is a good way of demonstrating your interest as well as learning more about food production methods and the role of salt in different food products
- ***Understand the range of different factors that influence food reformulation*** – these can include the market share and contribution to salt of different products, existing product cycles, new product development, seasonal issues and other economic or public health priorities that the company is trying to address.

4. SETTING TARGETS FOR SALT LEVELS IN FOODS

- ***Establish salt level targets for different*** as a way of levelling the playing field and overcoming many of the barriers to reducing salt levels in foods
- ***Monitor progress regularly*** – to ensure that different companies are staying on track and making the necessary reductions