

[New voluntary calorie guidelines to help industry tackle obesity](#)

The government is encouraging the food industry to support the national effort against COVID-19 and obesity, with [voluntary calorie reduction guidelines](#) to make it easier for the nation to choose healthier options in everyday meals and foods.

Voluntary guidelines for industry are a key commitment of the government's obesity strategy and have a renewed urgency following evidence that being overweight can increase the health risks from COVID-19. A recent Public Health England (PHE) report found that [being severely overweight increases people's risk of hospitalisation, Intensive Care Unit admission and death from COVID-19](#).

High calories in many products in a broad range of everyday meals and foods are one of the reasons why many of us are consuming more calories than we need.

Calories can be particularly high in takeaway and restaurant food, now a regular part of our diets. For example, a pizza for one sold at a restaurant or takeaway can have as many as 2,320 calories compared to 1,368 calories when purchased from shops or supermarkets. Research suggests that when someone eats out or has a takeaway meal they consume on average 200 more calories per day.

The food industry's efforts are crucial to providing healthier food and drink choices for consumers, and calorie reduction forms part of this. It is recommended that the following calorie reductions be made voluntarily:

- 20% calorie reduction for most meal categories in the eating out of home, takeaway and delivery sector, alongside a maximum calorie guideline for all categories
- for children's meal bundles, a 10% calorie reduction ambition has been set to reflect progress already made
- 10% calorie reduction ambition for retailers making ready meals, chips and garlic bread, alongside a maximum calorie guideline for all categories
- for crisps and savoury snacks, a 5% ambition
- combined guidelines for both sectors have been set for sandwiches (5% ambition) and pizza and pastry products (20% ambition)

[New voluntary salt reduction goals](#) have also been published today to encourage businesses to further reduce salt levels in the foods that contribute most to salt intakes.

Consuming too much salt is a major cause of high blood pressure which can lead to heart attacks and strokes. Despite good progress in some categories, more needs to be done to help reduce salt intake from the current average of

8.4g per day towards the recommended 6g – a reduction of around a third of a teaspoon, which would help to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

A [second progress report on salt reduction](#), which shows good progress in some categories, such as bread and breakfast cereals, has also been published.

Public Health Minister Jo Churchill said: “We can all do our bit to stay healthy, to help protect us from coronavirus and take pressure off the NHS.

“The food industry can play their part, by making it as easy as possible for everyone to eat more healthily. These guidelines will help them take positive action.”

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist for PHE, said: “Eating food and drink that’s higher in calories than people realise is one of the reasons why many of us are either overweight or obese.

“This is about broadening choice for consumers, as well as making the healthier choice the easy choice. Progress to date on sugar and salt reduction has shown that this can happen without compromising on taste and quality.”

A range of measures were recently announced as part of [the government’s new obesity strategy](#), including calorie labelling at large restaurants, cafes and takeaways, and PHE’s [Better Health campaign](#) to encourage people to lose weight, get active and eat better.

Industry’s progress against the programme’s ambitions will be monitored with reports on calorie and salt reduction expected in 2022. The government remains committed to further action if results are not seen.

Recommend calorie intake for adults

An ideal daily intake of calories varies depending on age, metabolism and levels of physical activity, among other things. Generally, the recommended daily calorie intake is 2,000 calories a day for women and 2,500 calories a day for men.

About the calorie reduction programme

PHE discussed initial proposals for the calorie reduction programme with relevant non-governmental groups and businesses in 2018. As part of the government’s childhood obesity plan, PHE was asked to encourage businesses to start considering calorie reduction ahead of the programme and guidelines. Since several rounds of significant stakeholder engagement, PHE reviewed stakeholder feedback and conducted further analysis to inform the final programme.

The food industry regularly reviews and reformulates product recipes and menus. The changes it is being expected to include are an opportunity to feed into their established product review and innovation programmes. There has been some good progress in salt and sugar reduction where this has been the

case and regular, transparent monitoring will underpin where there is future progress.

Calorie examples

Research shows that a pizza for one sold at shops or supermarkets can have as many as 1,368 calories and this rises to 2,320 calories when purchased from a restaurant or takeaway. For main meals, the calorie content ranges from 205 to 775 in supermarkets, whereas eating out options ranged from 385 calories but, in some cases, were over 2,000 calories.

About the salt reduction programme

Work on salt reduction began in the UK, in 2004, following advice from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) that recommended population average salt intakes should be reduced to 6g per day to reduce the risk of high blood pressure and hence cardiovascular disease (CVD).

The 2024 targets are the fifth set of voluntary salt reduction targets for individual categories of food – previous targets were published in 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2014. The foods covered by the salt targets are the main contributors to dietary salt intakes in adults in the UK. Targets include average and maximum targets per 100g of food or drink set for all sectors, and maximum per serving targets set specifically for the eating out of home sector.

Retailers continue to demonstrate good progress, meeting 83% of average and 90% of maximum targets, compared with manufacturers who met 35% and 73% respectively. For the out of home sector, 74% of products met the maximum targets set specifically for the sector.