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Use the **academic address** when writing about **salt control**—see the panel on page 4.

## Are Traffic Lights too good?

An article published in the Manchester Guardian on 28 December 2006 has revealed a lot of interesting things about Kellogg (UK).

In 2006 the company flew a handful of journalists to its Old Trafford corn flakes factory (opposite the famous cricket ground) and showed them into the nerve centre of planning for the Kellogg nutrition and labelling policy.

The British government's Traffic Light food labels created uproar and Kellogg—by its own admission—has led the drive to bring in an alternative form of labelling that the food industry can live with.

It has no red lights, only a row of percentages based on GDAs (Guideline Daily Amounts). The Australian version is the % DI (Percentage Daily Intake) Counter described on page 3.

Kellogg (UK) has also been at the heart of a lobbying campaign against Traffic Light labels that government regulators are describing as 'the most ferocious we have ever seen'.

At every attempt to explain Traffic Lights in other sectors of government in Whitehall, and in political party conferences, the regulators reported that Kellogg (UK) 'nearly always seemed to have been a few hours ahead of us lobbying for GDAs. They muddied the waters for us'.

Why is the food industry so bitterly opposed to Traffic Lights?

Obviously they expect red lights to damage business, but in the UK a more immediate threat is a separate proposal to ban TV advertising before 9 pm of any foods that would have red lights for fat, salt or sugar.

In 2005, cereals that would have qualified for red lights were advertised on TV before 9 pm at an estimated cost of £70 million (about \$175 million).

Heavy advertising accounts for the UK's annual consumption of 6.7 kg of cereals per person (on average everybody eats over half a standard serving per day).

### **Are Traffic Lights too good?**

Kellogg (UK) can see clearly that Traffic Lights would lead people to buy healthier foods.

But it would be morally and politically indefensible if an abrupt change of labels crippled large food companies overnight. Fairness to all concerned requires a gradual change (not a sudden one).

Mandatory Traffic Lights could wait for example until the food industry has had as much time as it needs to reformulate the red-light foods that can be changed.

# Nutrition Research Update: Salt and asthma

by Paul Jones, dietitian/nutritionist, Warwick Health Services, Queensland

*Salt Matters* summarises previous work on salt and asthma in pages 170–171.

A recent review published in the International Journal of Clinical Practice has looked at the effect of salt on asthma. Asthma is characterised by increasing reactivity of the bronchi (airways leading to the lungs).

The increasing rate of asthma in the late 20th century has raised the question of what has led to this change. It has been estimated to affect up to 1 in 4 children in the developed world.

Salt has been proposed as a factor in view of the increasing use of packaged foods and food eaten outside the home.

Studies looking at the effect of salt on asthma go back to 1938. Not much detail was provided in the earlier study. But reduced symptoms of asthma in children were noted when the salt in the diet was controlled.

A further study followed in 1988 to determine if changing the amount of salt in the diet had an effect. The people with asthma in the study had a high salt diet at the start (3588mg or 156mmol per day). This was increased up to 4958mg or 215mmol per day after 4 weeks.

Bronchial reactivity was increased with the increasing salt intake. A further study in 1989 using supplements of salt found increased reactivity in men.

Another study in 1993 showed improved lung function, reduced asthma symptoms and reduced medication use in men when on the lowest salt intake in the study (88 mmol/day, compared to up to 292mmol/day).

However, the studies conducted on asthma and salt have involved small numbers and short periods of time.

From the studies that have been done, it appears that a high salt diet increases asthma symptoms. However, the authors of the recent review call for larger trials to be conducted.

## Exercise induced asthma

During exercise, the effect of avoiding salt appears clearer. Studies have found that when on a high salt diet the breathing pattern is changed.

The volume of air able to be exhaled was reduced when eating a high salt diet. The amount of oxygen carried in the blood was reduced.

Improved lung function has been found after following a lower salt intake (1500mg or 65mmol per day) after only one week.

More recently, a study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, found that a high salt diet increased airway inflammation. The high salt diet also increased the blood volume, putting more pressure on the finer blood vessels. This may have led to more resistance in the airways.

Salt-related health problems (caused or aggravated by salt) affect at least half of the adult population. Asthma can certainly take its place as one of them.

## *Two recent references*

Mickleborough TD, Fogarty A, Dietary sodium intake and asthma: an epidemiological and clinical review, *Int J Clin Pract*, 2006; 60, 12: 1616-1624

Mickleborough TD, Lindley MR, Ray S. Dietary salt, airway inflammation, and diffusion capacity in exercise-induced asthma, *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2005; 37: 904-914

# How the % DI Counter works

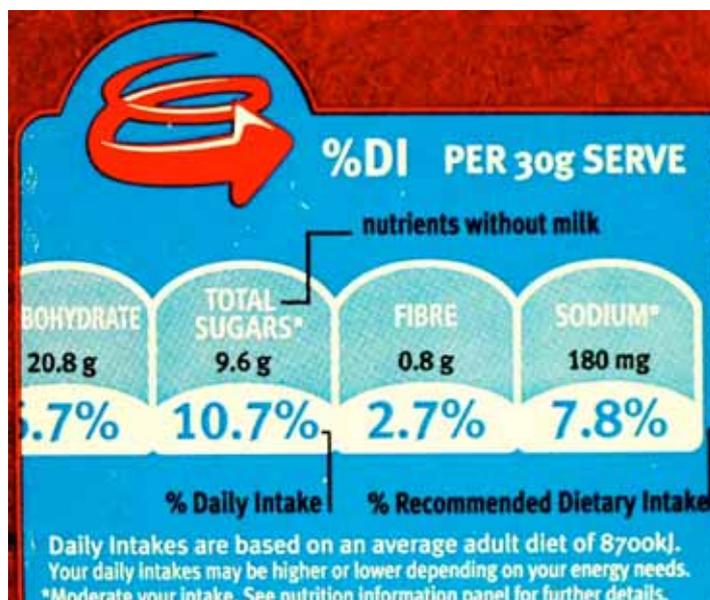
This is the explanation that Kellogg (Australia) prints on a packet of Nutri-Grain:

**See how Nutri-Grain fits into your day**

A varied diet and being active is the key to good health. Research suggests that the best way to do this is to choose a variety of foods and look to moderate your intake of fat, particularly saturated fat, sugar and salt and do regular exercise. However, sometimes getting the balance right can be difficult. To help you cut through the confusion, Kellogg has introduced the Daily Intake (DI) counter on pack.

It's a simple way to learn more about the daily intake of nutrients and energy for the whole day. The counter shows you what's in a serve of Kellogg's cereal and the percentage (%) it contributes to your daily diet. So getting the balance right just got easier.

Go to [www.kellogg.com.au](http://www.kellogg.com.au) to calculate the DI based on your own energy needs



The biggest figures in the strip of 8 percentages are for protein and sugar, but only **fat**, **saturated fat**, **sugar** and **sodium** have an asterisk telling you to moderate your intake. This is clearer in the enlarged picture (bottom left).

The figures show that a 30g serve of Nutri-Grain supplies 10.7% of the daily intake of sugar and 7.8% of the sodium, to a person who needs an energy intake of 8700 kJ per day.

Your own energy needs are likely to be different, but you can work out your personal correction factor by visiting [www.kellogg.com.au](http://www.kellogg.com.au)

The label refers you to the Nutrition Information Panel for further details.

# % DI Counter (continued)

## SALT SKIP NEWS

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Salt Skip News will  
continue to be distributed  
in hard copy in The BP  
Monitor (QHA newsletter)

## THE NUTRITION INFORMATION PANEL

The label at the bottom of page 3 refers the reader to the Nutrition Information Panel for further details. It is printed on the side of the packet, along with the ingredient list:

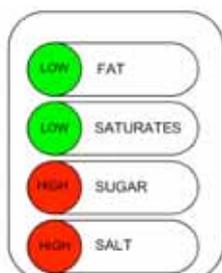
NUTRITION INFORMATION		
serve size 30g, serves per pack 11		
	per serve	per 100g
Energy (kJ)	479	1596
Protein (g)	6.6	21.9
Fat total (g)	0.2	0.6
saturated (g)	<0.1	0.1
Carbohydrate total (g)	20.8	69.4
sugars	9.6	32.0
sodium (mg)	180	600

**Ingredients:** Cereals 44% (wheat flour, oatmeal, maize flour), sugar, wheat gluten, molasses, salt, barley malt extract, minerals (calcium carbonate, iron), mineral salt (sodium bicarbonate), natural colour (paprika, turmeric), vitamins (Vitamin C, niacin, thiamine, vitamin B6, riboflavin, folate).

**HEALTH PROFESSIONALS and the technically minded** can see from the panel and the ingredient list that Nutri-Grain is less than 50% cereal, and has:

1. **too much sugar** (one-third is sugar)
2. **too much salt** (60% of the sodium content of seawater)

Most shoppers are not technically minded, and need help.



## TRAFFIC LIGHT LABELS

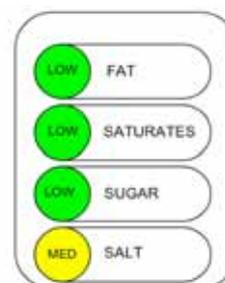
Traffic Light labels would help all shoppers—regardless of age, literacy, motivation, attention span, haste or memory—by showing them clearly that (by current UK criteria) Nutri-Grain has:

1. **too much sugar** (red light)
2. **too much salt** (red light)

## THE FEASIBILITY OF REFORMULATION

For salt an amber light would require only a marginal adjustment, but sugar would have to be halved to below 15%.

But a successful competitor (Sanitarium Weet-Bix) has done even better than that, with *green* for sugar. Weet-Bix is even more popular than Nutri-Grain, and the UK criteria would give it an amber light for salt (sodium 290 mg/100g) and green for sugar (under 5%).



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