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

## From niche market to mass market

### **Niche markets—the NO foods**

Most consumers who control their salt intake still see themselves as a deprived minority who have to restrict one of the good things in life—small wonder if the food industry sees us that way too.

We have no true allergy, so we get less attention than the consumers who need gluten-free, milk-free or lactose-free foods, or foods with no trace of peanuts. For some the wrong food may be suddenly life-threatening, with implications for litigation.

But the low salt market remains an unimportant niche market that can safely be given scant attention.

That is about to change. International dietary guidelines worldwide recognise salt as one of the **four main nutrients** that need control. This will put foods with good salt control fairly and squarely into the **mass market**.

### **Health—the 4 main risk factors**

The industrial societies would be far more healthy with a lower intake of:

1. fats
2. saturated fats
3. sugars
4. salt

The position Nathan Pritikin took on those four nutrients 40 years ago looked extreme, but now it is part of a massive international consensus on **the food that everybody needs**.

It is interesting to look at a recent proposal from the UK.



Late last year the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) proposed several different ways to show consumers at a glance how well a food met the international dietary guidelines. One was the Multiple Traffic Light system pictured above.

With this system all the health professionals who treated a salt-related illness could simply tell the patient/client to live on fresh foods and select only processed foods with a green spot for salt.

**In the UK a green spot for salt would indicate a salt content of 0.3% or less (sodium would be 118 mg/100g or less).**

Shoppers could see at a glance what a mistake it would be to eat the canned Irish Stew shown above with a red spot for salt (in colour in the PDF on the saltmatters website [www.saltmatters.org](http://www.saltmatters.org)).

It would make low salt shopping a pleasure if the UK adopted this system—and if we did.

## Travellers' tales

### *Rick Keam wrestles with eating out.*

One of America's great food writers of the 1950s and 60s was James Beard (no family connection with Salt Skip). When placed under doctor's orders to adopt a low-fat and low-salt lifestyle, he did it with style. Far from being a prison sentence, he said, it could be: '...a breakaway from the habits that have been formed during a lifetime—more creative than destructive...You are starting out on a whole new world of eating, and if you have any imagination whatsoever, you can have fun doing it.'

'As for restaurant dining,' he added, 'for the most part you are better off going to those where you are well known. In New York I can go to Quo Vadis, Trattoria de Alfredo, The Coach House, or to most any of my regular haunts. At Windows On The World or The Four Seasons, for instance, they wouldn't dream of letting me have anything with salt in it.'

The catch is that he was a famous face, a familiar patron, and commanded a respect partly based on fear. It is nice to fantasise that the world could be the same for us. "Mr Bloggs! It's a while since we've seen you! Yes, two for 7.30 will be fine—Andrew will call you back later to discuss the menu options. And you'd like the *pane Toscano* again?"

Dream on....

Cultivating one venue so they get to know your needs might sometimes be a possibility, but not when you're travelling. In our experience, a pub bistro is generally an easier place to avoid salt than many more upmarket places. A simple

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steak, or the fish of the day, may not be high cuisine but at least you'll enjoy a reasonable meal without having to make too much of a fuss. There are a couple of things to watch, however. Most of the sauces served with steak will contain salt one way or the other, and it is safer to ask for none. This might provide an excuse to have an accompanying drink. As a Meniere's sufferer I am well aware of advice to avoid alcohol, but have never had any problems with one standard glass, particularly if it is a low-alcohol beer. Your own experience will be your best teacher.

Many pub kitchens today produce vegetables, probably steamed, that aren't discernibly salty and are certainly healthier than fried chips. However, most of the better pubs now routinely serve their chips unsalted, and the rest will generally omit the salt if you ask. Just check to be sure.

If the salad bar offers the 'garden' variety, with plenty of whole leaves and maybe a minimal dressing of some simple vinaigrette, it will be fine. But if it is a pasta salad it will be far too salty, and so will the tizzied-up affair still served in a few diehard country pubs—shredded mayonnaised lettuce, some anaemic tomato, one slice of cheese fresh from its plastic wrap, one of tinned beetroot, one of tinned pineapple, one of ham, one of orange, and a boiled egg.

## Travellers' tales by Rick Keam—continued

Once you're tired of pub grub, what then? Cafés are a problem. If you're in luck you might find one offering a warm chicken salad, which is usually safe and often excellent, but always check with the staff—in one busy Melbourne pasta bar during the lunchtime peak, mine arrived smothered in honey soy sauce, which had not been listed in the dish's description on the menu. I then had to explain why I couldn't eat it. They graciously replaced it, after the necessary wait, but it was a situation everyone could have done without.

In reality it is a constant struggle to find even one café menu item that's safely salt-free or might be simply adapted, without causing chaos in a busy kitchen. But with a bit of perseverance and knowledge of ingredients, the situation can sometimes be salvaged. Here's part of the menu from one tourist-oriented establishment in Echuca, northern Victoria:

### Open-Face Sandwiches

*A bruschetta-style sandwich on toasted ciabatta*

- Smoked salmon, capers, red onion relish
- Chicken, bacon with a Caesar dressing
- Ham-off-the-bone and camembert
- Thinly-sliced eye fillet steak with roasted potato
- Swiss cheese, avocado & rocket pesto
- Baked eggplant and marinated roasted capsicum

It is unnecessary to salt an eggplant slice before baking, or to salt a marinade, but the salt-wise diner should assume the worst. It is just possible, though, that an enlightened chef may be innocent of both offences. If the place isn't too busy at the time, you might be inclined to ask. Otherwise you have one option. With tactical foresight, you have brought some NAS bread along. Avoiding the temptation to be cheeky and ask for the "steak'n spud sangers", you comment that "I see

from the menu that you've got some gluten-free bread, but I'm on this no-salt bread—could you do me the eye fillet and roasted potato on a toasted slice of it?"

The same place serves dinner on Friday and Saturday nights. Recent specials have included 'lemon grass tiger prawns on sun-dried tomato and roast pine nut salad with citrus dressing', and 'oven-baked pork fillet with roasted vegetables and Italian sausage with rocket and pine-nut pesto'. Unfortunately at least one major component of each dish rules them out for Salt Skippers. But two other options would be possibilities. These are the kangaroo fillet with thyme-roasted pumpkin and lemon date couscous with spicy plum sauce (the last almost certainly salty, so ask about a substitute), and the grilled blue-eye fillet on baby bok choy and honey roast carrot with lemon thyme jasmine rice (check that the honey roast carrot doesn't mean honey-soy-sauced roasted carrot).

All is not doom and gloom. On a trip through NSW last October, we had two outstanding meals without having to ask any special favours whatsoever. Equal first prize to the Riverfront Tavern at Southwest Rocks for its barramundi with lime butter (routinely unsalted) on a tropical salsa—and, as the Special the day before, a similar presentation of grilled swordfish—and to Phoebe's at the Ten Dollar Town Motel in Gulgong for its succulent roast duck breast with orange caramel liqueur on 'spinach', which in this case was not silver beet (as it usually is in misguided NSW!) but lightly cooked bok choy. Not a trace of saltiness anywhere.

Would other travelling Salt Skippers like to put forward their own nominations?

[Names of good NAS restaurants in each state could go on the web pages—Ed.]

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## Making LS meals using one RS ingredient

Reduced Salt foods are too salty of course when eaten alone. If they are not too far over the limit they can be diluted with NAS and LS foods to make low salt meals. In practice the highest you can go above the limit is the 400 mg/100g in Natex, the reduced salt yeast spread (a sandwich made with NAS bread needs only a very thin spread).

Exclude all foods that are over the limit except for use in **special recipes that mix them with other foods to make low salt foods**. Here are a few **special recipes**.

**Rosella RS Canned Tomato Soup** (155 mg/100 mL)

**barcode 9 332786 000181**

*Recipe*—First dilute it as directed (one can of concentrate to one can of water) then add an equal amount of vegetables, fresh, frozen or canned. That will bring the dish down below 120 mg/100g. Vegetables with sodium less than 10 mg/100g include your choice of peas, beans, green leaf vegetables, baked beans, potato, pumpkin, sweet potato, sweetcorn (fresh, frozen or canned).

**Campbell's Country Ladle RS Minestrone** (160 mg/100g)

**barcode 9 300644 238809**

*Recipe*—same as above for Rosella RS Tomato

**Continental RS French Onion Packet Soup** (165 mg/100g)

**barcode 9 300667 370272**

*Recipe*—either make it up with extra water—1.5 litres instead of one litre—or make it full strength and follow the same directions as for Rosella RS Tomato.

**Continental RS Chicken Noodle Packet Soup** (155 mg/100g)

**barcode 9 300667 310018**

*Recipe*—same directions as the French Onion Packet Soup

**Heinz Canned Big Red RS Tomato Soup** (sodium 130 mg/100g)

**barcode 9 300657 006075**

*Recipe*—although it is so close to 120 mg/100g it has a much better flavour with the same directions as for Rosella RS Tomato, especially if you add Herb & Garlic mixture (mail order from Spice World—see *Salt Matters*, page 257)

**Heinz Canned Very Vegetable Soup—Sweet Potato & Pumpkin** (125 mg/100g)

**barcode 9 300657 031220**

*Recipe*—this soup is consumed undiluted from the can. We have not had it analysed, but there is no taste of salt, and the marginal excess of 5 mg is less than 5% above the limit.

**STOP PRESS** The declared sodium content of 170 mg/100g in Coles Farmland NAS Red Kidney Beans came from a water softener of the type (ion-exchange) that replaces calcium and magnesium ions with sodium ions. The batch now on sale has a sodium content of 22 mg/100g (average of three analyses). Coles will not reprint the label, as they will replace this product in a few months with another home brand of NAS kidney beans. Meanwhile salt skippers can ignore the 170 mg/100g. The beans—now made with unsoftened water—are safe.

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