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### **Stroke Foundation research highlights the need to talk about salt**

This week, the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand has released research highlighting the unacceptably high salt content of sauces sold in New Zealand. Salt is a leading cause of high blood pressure which is a major contributor to 75% of all strokes in New Zealand.

The research by the National Institute for Health Innovation (NIHI) and commissioned by the Stroke Foundation examined the salt content of over 1,050 sauces sold in New Zealand.

It found that 6 out of 10 sauces sold in New Zealand supermarkets were not meeting voluntary salt targets, set by the Heart Foundation.

Asian cuisine sauces - such as soy, fish, and oyster sauces are a particular cause for concern, with only 4% of products in this category meeting voluntary salt reduction targets.

"The very high salt content of sauces sold in New Zealand is fueling a high blood pressure epidemic, affecting 1 in 5 New Zealanders and putting them at an increased risk of a life-threatening stroke. One brand of fish sauce had 4,000 times more salt than a low-sodium alternative, so we know for certain that it is possible for manufacturers to modify their recipes to support greater health and wellbeing," says Jo Lambert, Chief Executive of the Stroke Foundation.

Last year, the World Health Organization (2021) listed reducing salt intake, through food reformulation, as a 'best buy' investment for controlling non-communicable diseases such as stroke, heart disease and cancer. Approximately 9,500 strokes are experienced in New Zealand every year. This equates to one stroke every 55 minutes (2020), at a cost to society of over \$1.1 billion per annum.

The Stroke Foundation is calling for the introduction of government-led salt targets to lift significant pressure on the health system by reducing the burden of stroke in our communities. "It is time for us to question whether the food industry is willing and able to meet voluntary targets.", says Lambert. "We need to act now to join the 48 other nations across the world that have introduced salt targets to industry," she added.

The Stroke Foundation urges people when shopping to compare the Nutrition Information Panels of different sauce brands and select the one with the lowest salt (sodium) per serving. Making simple changes like this all add up to making big differences to your daily salt intake.

The Foundation also recommends that New Zealanders add flavour to meals with ingredients that do not contain salt, such as herbs, spices, citrus juices, pepper, garlic, ginger, or onions. The Foundation has shared 5 smart swaps for salt for shoppers - [https://youtu.be/nNuXMtUma\\_M](https://youtu.be/nNuXMtUma_M)

- ENDS -

## Sources

- National Institute for Health and Innovation at the University of Auckland (2021). The Sodium Content of Pre-Packaged Sauces in New Zealand, 2013 – 2019.
- World Health Organization. (2021). Saving lives, spending less: the case for investing in noncommunicable diseases.
- Hogan, S., & Siddharth, P. (2020). The social and economic costs of stroke in New Zealand – 2020 update.

## Notes to editors

- New Zealand does not have a government-led salt reduction programme.
- Anyone who cuts down their salt consumption will help reduce their risk of stroke, while also reducing the huge burden on the health sector and economy, currently estimated at \$1.1 billion per annum due to stroke.
- Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability and the second-biggest single cause of death in New Zealand for all adults. Indigenous and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately impacted by stroke.
- 75% of all strokes are preventable and high blood pressure is the leading risk factor for stroke.
- On average, one in five New Zealanders has high blood pressure.
- Researchers involved in this study: National Institute of Health Innovation and the University of Auckland

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## About the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand

First established over 40 years ago, the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand is the national organisation providing information and personalised, community-based services to people who have survived a stroke, their whānau and carers. The Foundation employs Community Stroke Advisors and Return to Work Advisors, who offer home visits, rehabilitation advice, workplace advocacy and referrals to health professionals. The Stroke Foundation also has a team of health promoters who travel the country working to prevent strokes. The Stroke Foundation of New Zealand is registered with the Charities Commission (CC49241) and is reliant on funding from donations, bequests, and grants. To find out more about the Stroke Foundation, go to [www.stroke.org.nz](http://www.stroke.org.nz)

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