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THE UGLY TRUTH ABOUT SALTY SNACKS AND STROKE

- New research reveals 50 percent of snack foods are not meeting voluntary salt targets
- Manufacturers and Government must step up

Fact: The more salt you eat, the greater the risk of high blood pressure and having a stroke, with crisps and savoury snacks significant culprits according to new research commissioned by the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand.

Stroke Foundation Chief Executive, Jo Lambert, says the government and food manufacturers need to do more to slash the salt in processed foods and reduce the risk of stroke.

“Reducing salt will help combat the 75 percent of strokes that are preventable. It’s disheartening to find only half the foods tested in our study met voluntary targets for salt content. Some savoury snacks contained over half a teaspoon of salt per serve, which is more than 50 percent of someone’s recommended maximum daily intake,” she says

“Food manufacturers must consider the health of their customers, and the government must think more about stroke prevention through salt targets, rather than the public health system being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff,” she says.

Analysis of 888 crisps and savoury snacks sold in New Zealand between 2013 – 2019, found huge variation with some snacks containing 360 times more salt than similar products. Jo says this variation highlights the feasibility of reducing the amount of salt in snack foods.

“Some manufacturers have made real progress to reduce salt in their products, but this isn’t happening across the board. The government needs to get more hands-on and set targets for food reformulation, that all manufacturers are strongly encouraged or required to reach,” explains Jo.

Each year, approximately 9,500 New Zealanders experience a stroke, costing the New Zealand economy \$1.1 billion. 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.

“This research shows once again that increasing our efforts to reduce the amount of salt in processed foods can improve everyone’s health,” explains Jo.

While we wait for the government to take action on processed food manufacturers, consumers are encouraged to eat more whole foods and vegetables instead of salty crisps and savoury snacks. If they do treat themselves, we encourage them all to look for low salt options (less than 520mg of sodium per 100g of food).

- ENDS -

Notes to editors

- Stroke is NZ's second single-biggest killer and the leading cause of serious adult disability.
- Māori and Pacific Peoples are more likely to experience a stroke than NZ Europeans, and also about 15 years younger.
- The World Health Organization recommends a maximum dietary sodium intake of 2000 mg/day (5g of salt).
- An online survey in the first NZ COVID-19 lockdown found 33% of adult respondents (n=3028) increased their intake of salty snacks during the lockdown.
- Another study found NZ children consume snack foods on average 1.2 (95%CI 0.9, 1.6) times per day, with Māori and Pacific Peoples children consuming less healthy snacks on average compared to Pākehā.
- NZ does not have a government-led salt reduction programme. The main national initiative to reduce sodium content and intake is a voluntary food reformulation programme led by NZ Heart Foundation, with targets set for participating companies to reduce the sodium content of foods.
- 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

The Stroke Foundation is a national charity in New Zealand focused on the prevention of and recovery from stroke. For over 40 years we have actively promoted ways to avoid stroke and dedicated ourselves to working closely with stroke survivors across the country. The generosity of New Zealanders enables us to help thousands of stroke survivors every year; providing them with critical services to ensure the best possible outcomes – not just for themselves, but also their family/whānau and carers too. Three-quarters of strokes are preventable, so we will continue our vital awareness campaigns and health promotion programmes – saving thousands of lives. To find out more about the important work the Stroke Foundation does, go to www.stroke.org.nz