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## Consensus Action on Salt and Health CASH

### Media Release

[www.actiononsalt.org.uk](http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk)

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## Is your pasta sauce ‘Full of it’? It’s hard to tell...

- Research finds huge variations in salt levels of pasta sauces
- Celebrity chef brands are some of the worst offenders
- Labelling is inconsistent, making it confusing and unclear

**12 November 2009** New research carried out by Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) shows that many pasta sauces on sale in the UK, particularly some branded products and those fronted by celebrity chefs, contain much higher amounts of salt than others [1].

The Food Standards Agency’s salt campaign encourages consumers to read the labels, and see which pasta sauces are ‘Full of it’ [2]. This new research shows that the pasta sauces’ labelling and portion sizes are inconsistent, and in some cases missing completely, so understanding the salt content is confusing and unclear, making this advice very difficult to follow.

CASH surveyed 190 jars, pots and packets of pasta sauces [3]. Both branded and supermarket own-label products from Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, Morrison’s, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Somerfield and the Co-op were included in the research.

Combined, the branded sauces, including Dolmio, Ragu, Jamie Oliver and Loyd Grossman averaged at 1.17g of salt per 100g, while the supermarket own-label products combined averaged at around 0.86g of salt per 100g, 25% less than the branded products.

Comparing similar sauces by portion size proved very difficult as different products had differing suggested portion sizes. Over a third (73 of the 190 products) did not provide salt or sodium data per portion, and over a quarter (52 of the 190 products) gave no portion size information. Napolina products give their customers no information about the salt or sodium content at all. As a result, it was often easier to look at the salt content per 100g when making comparisons, but this does not help the customer to work out how much salt they are eating in a serving of sauce.

The largest range of salt content was seen in the tomato-based pasta sauces. The highest salt product found on the shelves was Jamie Oliver's Spicy Olive and Garlic sauce with 3.0g of salt per 100g. Per half a 350g jar this works out as 5.3g (as stated on pack), which is nearly all (88%) of an adult's recommended limit of 6g of salt per day in one serving, and the same salt content as over ten packets of ready-salted crisps. Weight Watchers' Roasted Garlic pasta sauce contains just 0.1g of salt per 100g, a thirtieth of the Jamie Oliver sauce's salt level.

The highest salt supermarket own brand sauce found in the survey was Sainsbury's Puttanesca Pasta Sauce, which contains 2.0g of salt per 100g. The Co-operative Tomato & Olive Pasta Sauce contains 0.7g of salt per 100g, over four times lower than the Jamie Oliver sauce and almost three times lower than the Sainsbury's sauce.

Huge variations were found in other sauces with similar ingredients, for example Loyd Grossman's Bolognese sauce contains 1.5g of salt per 100g whilst ASDA's Good For You Bolognese was found to contain just 0.3g of salt per 100g, a fifth of the salt content of the Loyd Grossman version.

Stir-through sauces are thicker and more concentrated than standard pasta sauces, so will have smaller serving sizes, but there are still large variations in their salt contents even within brands. The highest salt stir-through in this survey was Sacla's Spicy Tomato & Pepper stir-through which contains 2.0g of salt per 100g, while the lowest product was Sacla's Oven Roasted Tomato & Rocket Stir-through, which contains 1.0g/100g, half the amount of the other Sacla product.

Looking at carbonara sauces, Dolmio Express Creamy Carbonara Microwaveable sauce contains 1.5g of salt per 100g, while Morrisons Eat Smart Carbonara Pasta Sauce contains a fifth of this level – 0.3g of salt per 100g.

Pesto sauce is eaten in smaller quantities, but can still contain a lot of salt. Most of the green pesto sauces surveyed would have to carry a red label for their salt content under a 'traffic light' labelling system, indicating that they contain more than 1.5g of salt per 100g. The lowest salt green pesto found was Marks & Spencers' Pesto Alla Genovese at 1.0g per 100g. Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Pesto Alla Genovese was the highest salt green pesto in the survey at 3.2g of salt per 100g. Weight for weight, this is saltier than seawater [4].

Weight Watchers had the two lowest salt products found in the survey: Weight Watchers' Roasted Garlic pasta sauce (0.1g salt per 100g) and Weight Watchers' Napoletana, (0.15g salt per 100g). Supermarkets also produce several own-label products under 0.3g of salt per 100g, which would be classified as 'green' under the traffic light labelling system and should be congratulated.

"Pasta with sauce is a quick and simple meal for many of us," said Katharine Jenner, Nutritionist and CASH Campaign Manager. "But this survey shows it can be incredibly hard to choose a healthy option. There are still some sauces on the shelves with really high levels of hidden salt. We found a 30-fold variation within the tomato based pasta sauces and 22 of the 190 products we looked at do not meet the 2010 Food Standards Agency targets for salt content [5]. We urge manufacturers to reduce their salt content and improve their labelling immediately."

"In general, sauces containing ingredients such as olives and bacon tend to be saltiest, whereas sauces with chilli or basil tend to be lower in salt," says Hannah Brinsden who carried out the research for CASH. "Better still, many of the sauces we looked at can be made easily and more cheaply at home, with a far lower level of salt. We've put simple, tasty recipes for pesto, carbonara, and tomato-based sauces on our website. None of them contains more than half a gram of salt per serving [6]."

"Salt puts up our blood pressure, which is the major risk factor for strokes, heart failure and heart disease, the leading causes of death and disability in the UK," says Graham MacGregor, Chairman of CASH and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine.

"It is shocking to see so many products still so poorly labelled and high in salt. However, many brands, in particular supermarket own brands, have far less salt, proving that it is not necessary

to add loads of salt to make a tasty product. People should either choose clearly labelled lower salt pasta sauces or ideally make their own. Reducing the amount of salt they eat will reduce their risk of suffering a stroke or a heart attack.”

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**For more information, please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors and References:**

[1] A file with the full survey details should be attached with this release. If it is missing, or you have problems opening the file, please contact Katharine Jenner or Wendy Jarrett on the numbers above.

[2] The Food Standards Agency Salt Campaign advises consumers to look at pasta sauce labels, and to try & make their own versions at home. For more information: [www.salt.gov.uk](http://www.salt.gov.uk)  
For more low-salt recipes go to: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/recipes/>

[3] 190 pasta sauces were included in this survey – we looked at tomato-based sauces with no cheese or meat added; green pesto and carbonara. The products surveyed included ambient (jars and cartons), fresh (from the chiller cabinet) and more concentrated stir-through (both ambient and fresh) sauces.

[4] Atlantic seawater contains 1.0g of sodium per 100g, which equates to 2.5g of salt per 100g.

[5] The 2010 FSA target for pasta sauce is 1.1g of salt per 100g. The target for pesto and other thick sauces is 3.0g of salt per 100g.

[6] Recipes will be available on our website from the morning of Thursday 12 Nov. If you would like to see or use them, please contact Katharine Jenner or Wendy Jarrett.

**Other notes**

- The new Napolina range provides no salt or sodium data on pack.
- 52 products did not provide portion data at all, and 73 products did not provide salt or sodium data per portion making them difficult to compare, except by 100g
- Jamie Oliver products show percentage of Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA's) for a half jar, which we have taken to represent a portion.
- Product descriptions
  - Arrabiata = Tomato & chilli
  - Puttanesca = Tomato with anchovies, capers and olives
  - Napoletana = Tomato & herb
  - Primavera = Tomato & vegetable
  - Bolognese = Tomato & olive oil

## Methodology

- 190 pasta sauces were included in this survey – we looked at tomato based sauces with no cheese or meat added, green pesto and carbonara. (ambient, fresh and stir-though)
- Supermarket own brand and branded products, including premium, organic, economy and standard versions were included
- The survey was conducted during October 2009. All products mentioned in this release were re-checked on 5-6<sup>th</sup> November.
- Data were collected from packaging in store and online. Information was collected from Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Somerfield and Co-op.
- Information was also collected for 'own brand' ingredients to make a homemade pasta sauce.
  - o Although all were not available in every store we aimed to get black/green olives, chopped tomatoes, tomato puree, Parmesan, smoked/unsmoked back bacon, pine nuts, double cream and single cream from each.
  - o Other recipe ingredients were analysed using Diet Plan 6.

## 5 Highest Salt Tomato-Based Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Jamie Oliver Spicy Olive, Garlic and Tomato	Ambient	3.0	5.3
Sainsbury's Puttanesca	Ambient	2.0	not provided
Sainsbury's Siciliana	Ambient	1.8	not provided
Jamie Oliver Fiery Tomato and Chilli	Ambient	1.7	3.0
Jamie Oliver Red Onion & Rosemary	Ambient	1.6	2.8

## 5 Lowest Salt Tomato-Based Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
ASDA Good For You Bolognese Pasta Sauce	Ambient	0.3	not provided
Sainsbury's Spicy Tomato Sauce	Fresh	0.28	0.48
Co-operative Arrabiata Pasta Sauce	Fresh	0.25	0.4
Weight Watchers Napoletana	Fresh	0.15	not provided
Weight Watchers Roasted Garlic Pasta Sauce	Ambient	0.1	0.2

### 5 Highest Salt Carbonara Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Dolmio Express Creamy Carbonara Microwaveable Sauce	Ambient	1.5	2.1
Waitrose Fresh Carbonara	Fresh	1.08	1.88
Marks & Spencer Carbonara	Ambient	1.03	not provided
Loyd Grossman Carbonara with Pancetta	Ambient	1.0	not provided
Somerfield Carbonara	Ambient	1.0	1.3

### 5 Lowest Salt Carbonara Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Sainsbury's Italian Carbonara	Fresh	0.60	1.05
Morrisons Creamy Carbonara Pasta Sauce	Fresh	0.6	1
ASDA Carbonara	Fresh	0.6	not provided
Sainsbury's Taste The Difference Carbonara	Fresh	0.57	1.01
Morrisons Eat Smart Carbonara Pasta Sauce	Fresh	0.3	0.5

### 5 Highest Salt Stir-through Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Sacla Spicy Tomato & Pepper Stir Through Sauce	Ambient	2.0	not provided
Sacla Sundried Tomato & Garlic Stir Through Sauce	Ambient	1.8	not provided
Sacla Tomato & Olive Stir Through	Ambient	1.8	not provided
Dolmio Stir In Sundried Tomato	Ambient	1.55	1.2
Dolmio Stir In Sundried Tomato (light)	Ambient	1.55	1.2

### 5 Lowest Salt Stir-through Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Dolmio Stir In Spicy Tomato & Sweet Onion	Ambient	1.3	0.9
Dolmio Stir In Cherry Tomato & Pesto	Ambient	1.3	0.9
Seeds of Change Sundried Tomato & Basil Stir In	Ambient	1.25	not provided
Dolmio Stir In Sweet Pepper	Ambient	1.24	0.9
Sacla Oven Roasted Tomato & Rocket Stir Through	Ambient	1.0	not provided

### 5 Highest Salt Pesto Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Pesto Alla Genovese	Ambient	3.2	1.0
Jamie Oliver Green Pesto	Ambient	3.0	1.4
Sainsbury's Green Pesto	Ambient	3.0	not provided
Sacla Classic Basil Pesto	Ambient	2.8	not provided
Sacla Organic Green Basil Pesto	Ambient	2.5	not provided

### 5 Lowest Salt Pesto Sauces per 100g

Product	Type	Salt/100g	Salt/portion
Marks & Spencer Green Pesto	Ambient	1.5	not provided
ASDA Green Pesto	Ambient	1.4	not provided
Morrisons Green Pesto	Ambient	1.3	0.5
ASDA Reduced Fat Green Pesto	Ambient	1.1	not provided
Marks & Spencer Pesto Alla Genovese	Ambient	1.0	not provided