

# More lower-sodium products to help S'poreans cut salt intake

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SINGAPORE - There are now more than 200 lower-sodium salt and sauce products for consumers to choose from here, the result of efforts to give Singaporeans a healthier choice.

The Health Promotion Board (HPB) said such Healthier Choice products - which carry a "lower in sodium" label - contain at least 25 per cent less sodium compared with similar products in the same food category.

The HPB, in response to queries from The Straits Times, said it has been working to help Singaporeans cut their sodium intake.

The latest National Population Health Survey, released last month, showed that nine in 10 people here exceeded the World Health Organisation's recommended daily limit of 2,000mg of sodium.

The overconsumption of salt is associated with higher blood pressure, which in turn thickens blood vessel walls and significantly increases the risk of heart diseases and stroke - the cause of one out of three deaths here.

Apart from its labelling scheme, the HPB has also been working with industry to reformulate their products into healthier ones.

It introduced the Healthier Ingredient Development Scheme in 2017 which gives food manufacturers grant support to develop a wider variety of healthier ingredients and products, as well as to promote the uptake of healthier ingredients in the food service sector.

A spokesman for the HPB said five sauce suppliers and one salt supplier are participating in the scheme, three of which supply to more than 150 eateries, including hawker and coffee shop stalls, school canteens and caterers. Soya sauce and oyster sauce are among the common cooking ingredients with reduced sodium content.

"We have also conducted sodium reduction trials with market leaders in the food service sector to test if product reformulations are feasible and if consumers will accept them," the spokesman added.

"We found that switching to lower-sodium ingredients successfully lowered sodium intake with minimal impact on cost and consumer experience."

Lower-sodium guidelines were also introduced into the whole-of-government healthier catering policy in May this year, he added.

"This requires all caterers engaged by government procuring entities to use lower-sodium ingredients for cooking and food preparation."

He added that HPB is working with food and beverage partners to offer lower-sodium meals as part of their permanent core menu offerings. Dietitian and founder of Eat Right clinic and nutrition consultancy Derrick Ong said Singaporeans could be consuming more salt as they eat out more often and processed foods and fast foods are easily available.

To cut salt consumption, he suggested: "We can buy products that do not have sodium or MSG (monosodium glutamate) as one of the first three ingredients listed on the packaging, and use fresh herbs and spices instead of salt or sauces in cooking."

"When eating out, we can ask for less or no gravy in our food, or not finish the gravy or soup in dishes such as laksa and mee siam," he added.