Low- and No-Sodium Foods and Beverages in the U.S.

Description: Low-sodium/salt and no sodium/salt foods and beverages are a major food trend for 2010. Although such foods have been around for decades, most have not met with enthusiastic consumer response because of taste issues or insufficient concern on the part of buyers about the benefits of reducing sodium intake. Consumer awareness of the benefits of reducing salt (sodium chloride) and sodium in the diet is high at the beginning of 2010. In addition, food and beverage manufacturers are leading the charge in renovating familiar and popular products to contain less sodium. Some food and beverage manufacturers are doing this silently and in increments, gradually reducing the salt content of their products without alerting the consumer. Others display the reduced or low-sodium content in banner ads prominently on labels, to call attention to the product containing less sodium than the original.

An estimated 75% of salt in the average U.S. diet derives from processed foods and beverages, and restaurant food. In addition to enhancing flavor, salt plays a critical role in texture and safety of foods, as well as being used as a binder, color developer, fermenting agent and preservative in prepared and processed foods and beverages. The recommended daily intake (RDI) in the U.S. for sodium is 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day (about one teaspoon of salt), but the average U.S. citizen consumes an estimated 3,800 mg of sodium per day. Consumers who eat predominantly processed foods or fast-food restaurant products may easily consume 10,000 mg of sodium per day.

The human craving for salt is natural and necessary, because this is a nutrient essential for maintaining healthy extracellular fluid volume and balance in the body, which are necessary for life. Sodium chloride has a unique taste and efforts to mimic it, such as with potassium chloride, have not been very successful. A major area of activity for suppliers of salt alternatives to manufacturers of the new wave of reduced and low-sodium foods and beverages is research on ingredients and technologies to compensate for reduced salt that will create tasty products.

The U.S. market for low-sodium/low-salt, no sodium/no salt and no sodium or salt added products was estimated at $21.8 billion in 2009. Of this amount, approximately $16.6 billion comprises reduced or low-sodium/salt foods and beverages. Each year, new categories of products with low-sodium/salt or reduced sodium/salt tags enter the market, and between 2002 and 2007, there was nearly a 100% increase in the number of food and beverage products introduced to the U.S. market that had a low-sodium/salt or no sodium/salt claim. From 2005 to 2009, the number of introductions increased only about 2.4%, with the largest number of products--282--introduced in 2007.

Several consumer and health organizations have called for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to revisit the 50-year-old ruling that salt is a generally-recognized-as-safe (GRAS) product. These agencies wish to see salt listed as a food additive and/or changes in labeling to warn consumers about salt's association with hypertension. However, large-scale studies on the relationship between sodium and salt consumption have generated mixed results as to the detrimental effects of excessive sodium intake and cardiovascular disease in the general population. It appears that, with the exception of salt-sensitive individuals (who may comprise up to 25% of the population), there is little evidence that dietary sodium raises blood serum sodium. However, 25% of the U.S. population is a lot of people. In addition, evidence is emerging to suggest excess sodium is implicated in the development of kidney damage, osteoporosis and stomach cancer.

Low- and No-Sodium Foods and Beverages in the U.S. discusses key trends affecting the marketplace, notable product introductions, trends driving growth, technological challenges and advances, and consumer demographics. The report profiles major marketers of reduced and low-sodium food and beverage products and suppliers of salt and salt substitutes to food manufacturers, as well as innovative companies in both of these sectors.

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