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Finland's approach with an emphasis on salt

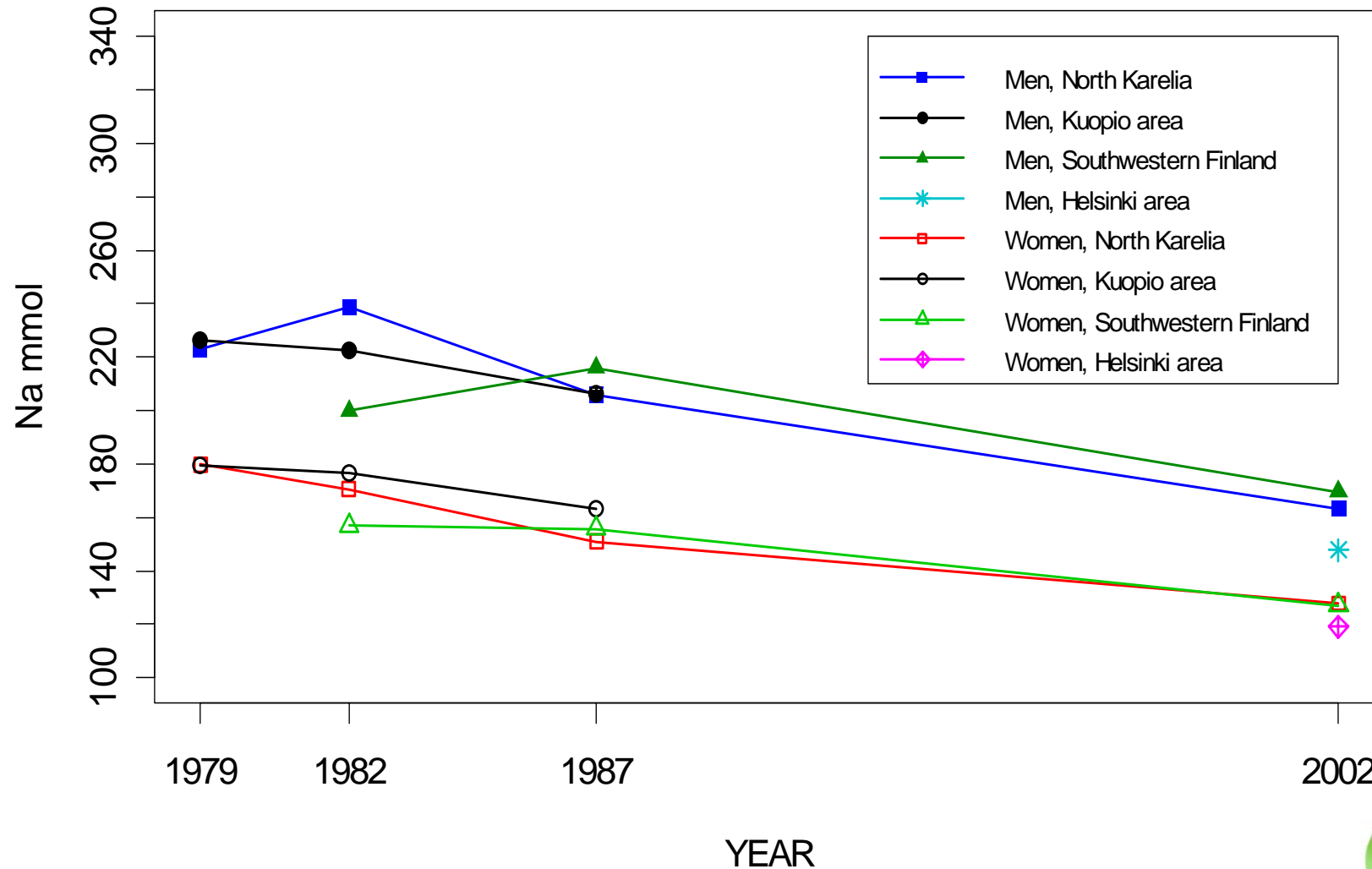
Pirjo Pietinen, Professor
ICN2009, Bangkok

30 years of systematic work concerning salt

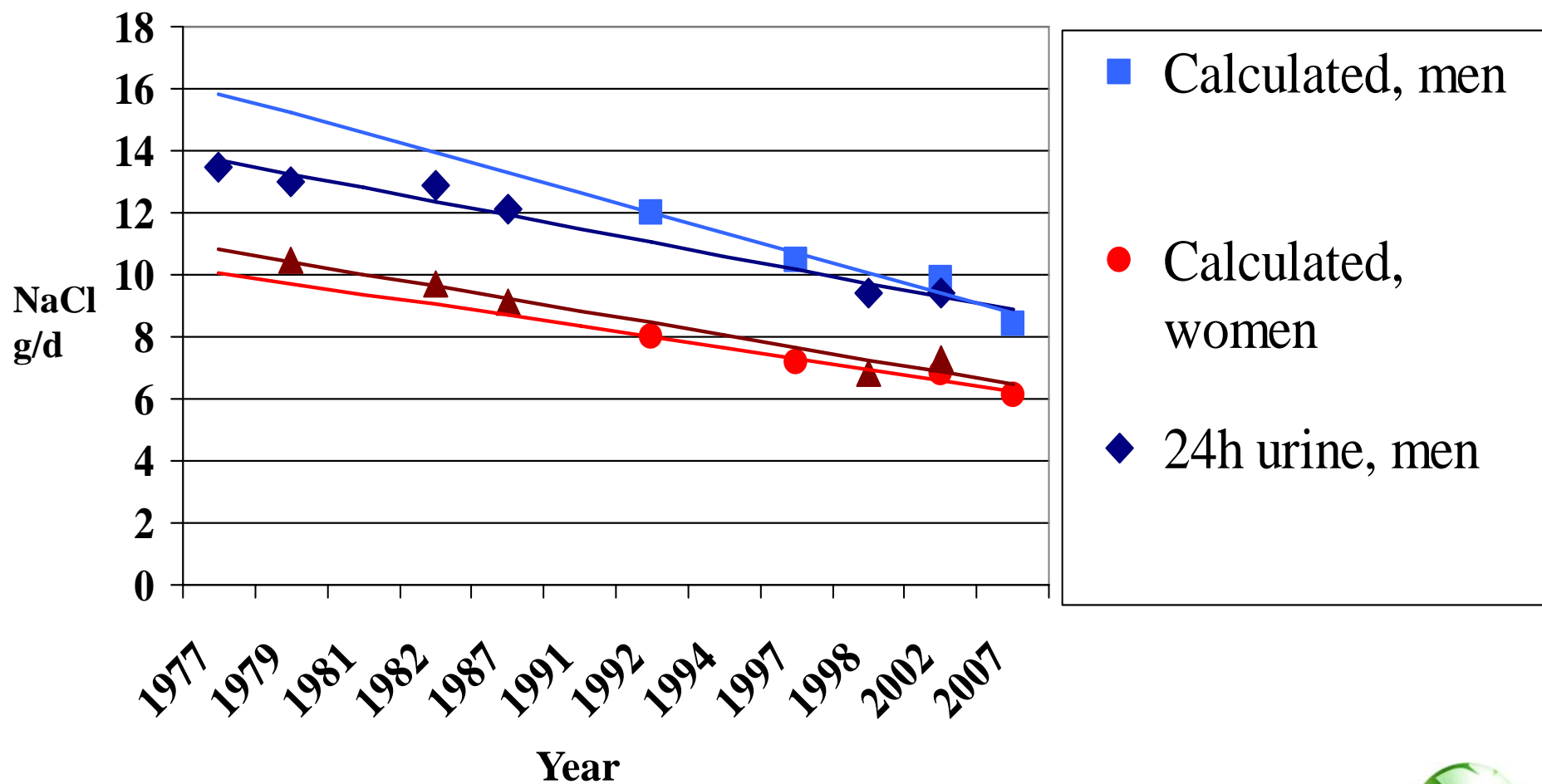
- Recommendation to reduce salt intake by the National Nutrition Council in 1978
- 1979-1982 The North Karelia Salt project with population surveys in 1979 and 1982
- Mass media campaigns, cooperation with food industry to reduce salt voluntarily, education of health care personnel
- Expanded after the 3-year project to the whole country
- The public became aware of salt and BP
- Regular monitoring was established (population surveys every 5 years)
- The first national labelling decrees were launched in 1993 and have since been updated



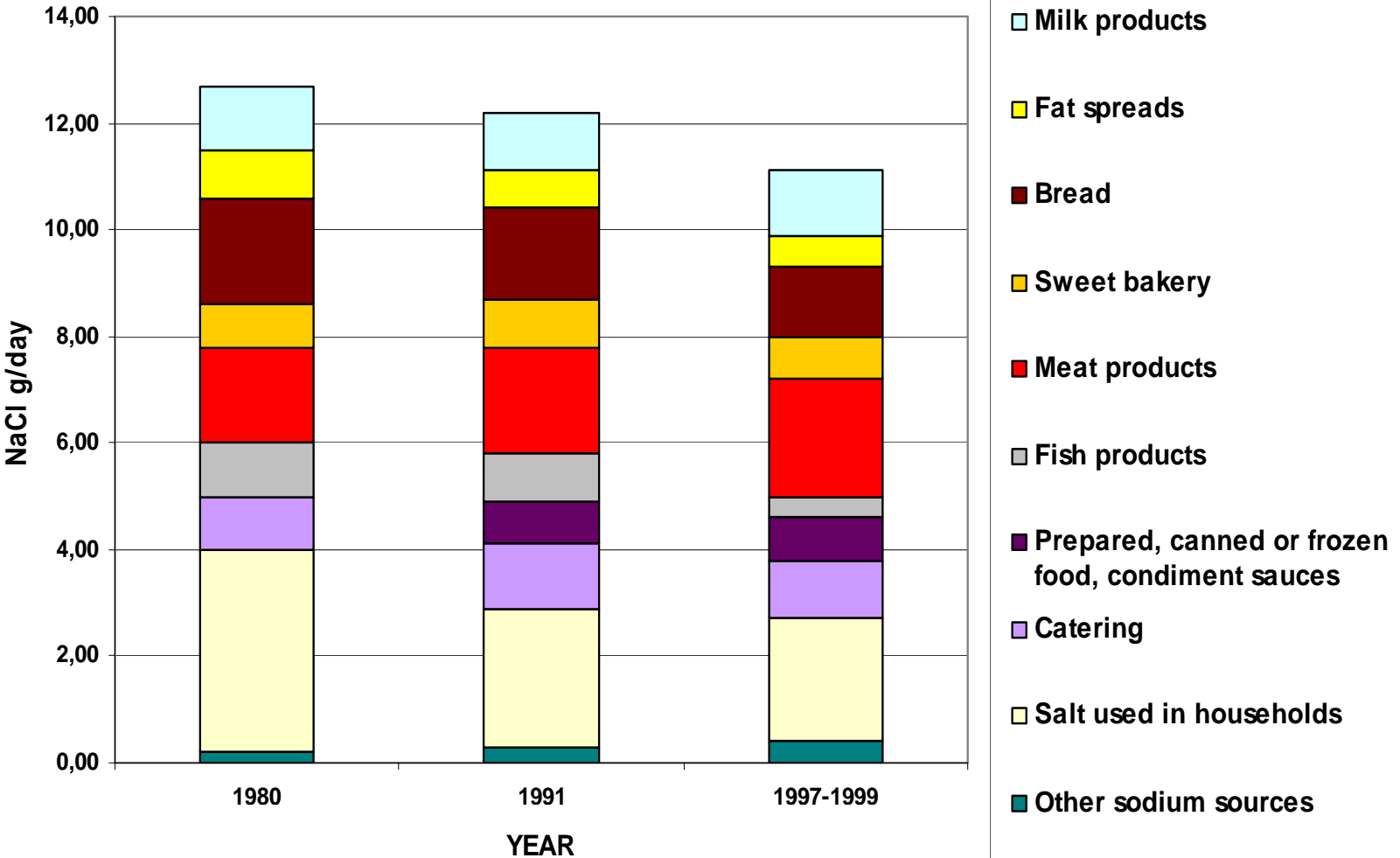
24-h sodium excretion



Salt intake in Finland 1977-2007



Sources of salt in the Finnish diet



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Compulsory labelling of salt:

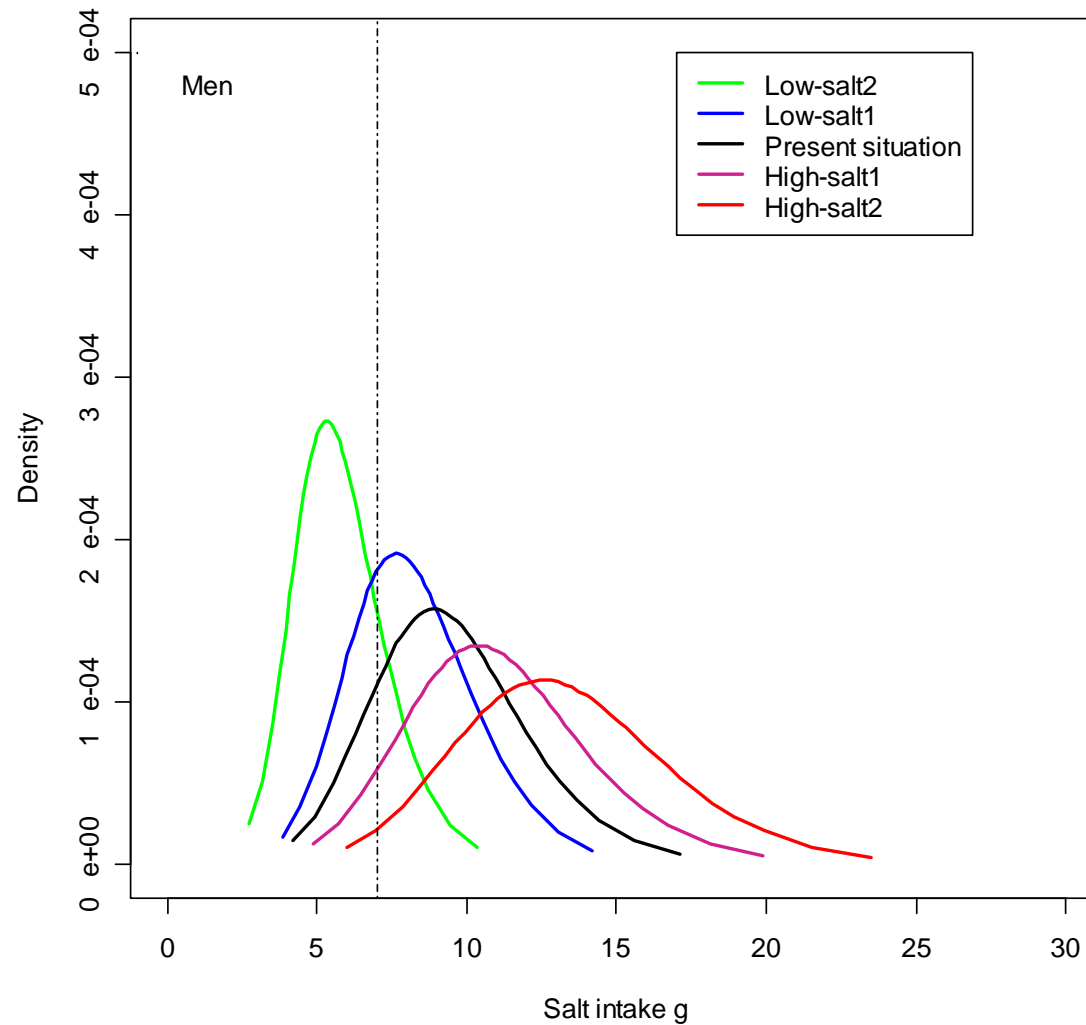
- Cheese
- Sausages and other meat products
- Fish products
- Bread, crisp bread and thin crisp bread
- Broths, soups and sauces, also as powder and concentrate
- Other prepared or semi-prepared foods
- Mixed spices containing table salt



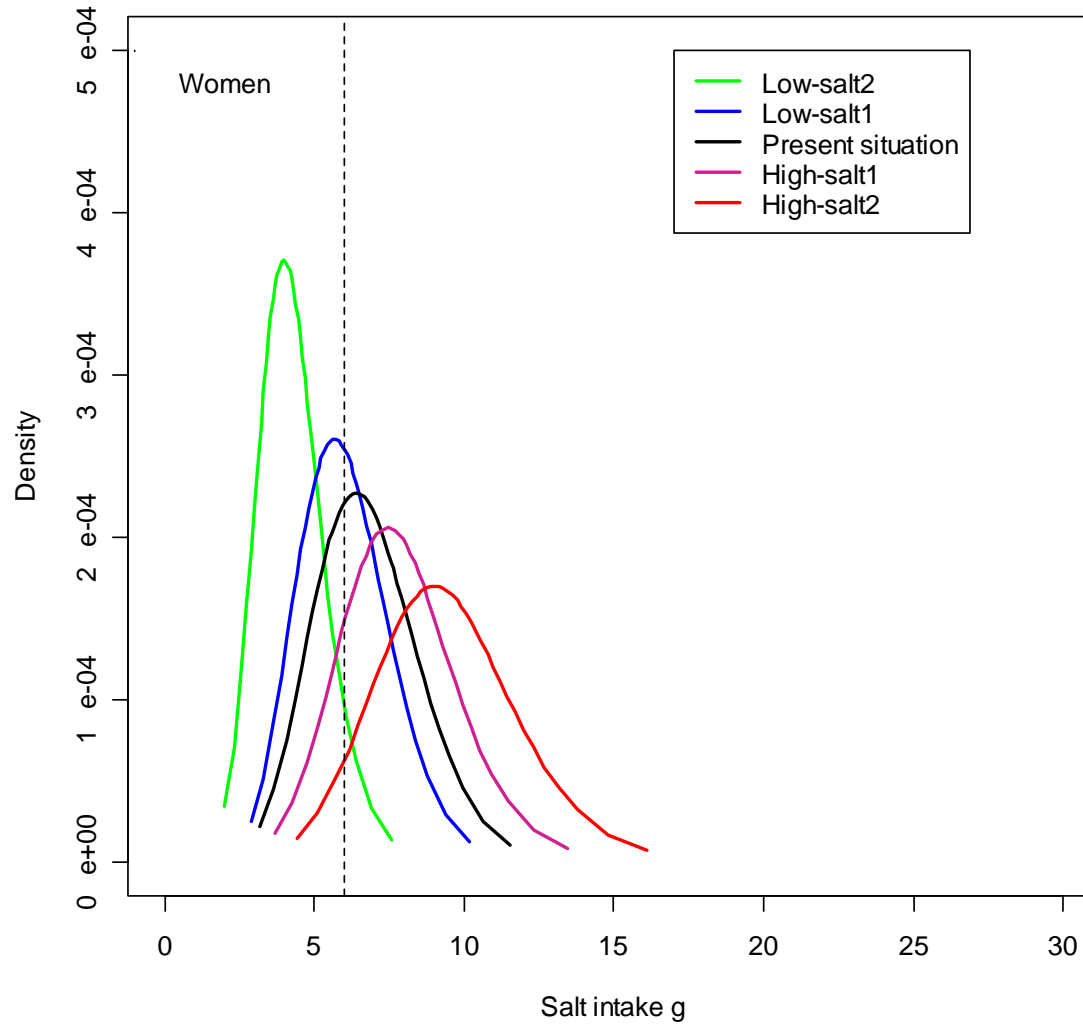
| | NaCl % limits | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Labelling of salt : criteria | | |
| Food category | "Highly salty" (reduced by 0.1 %) | "Reduced salt" >25 % less salt than normal product |
| Fresh bread | >1.2 | max 0.9 |
| Crisp bread | >1.6 | max 1.2 |
| Cheese | >1.3 | max 1.0 |
| Sausages | >1.7 | max 1.3 |
| Cold whole meat cuts | >1.9 | max 1.4 |
| Breakfast cereals | >1.6 | max 1.2 |
| Soups, broths, sauces | >0.9 | max 0.7 |
| Prepared and semi- prepared foods | >1.1 | max 0.8 |
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Distribution of salt intake by choice of low or high-salt products. Findiet 2002.



Distribution of salt intake by choice of low or high-salt products. Findiet 2002.



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- Over 430 "Heart symbol foods" on the market
- More than 70 food companies
- The Heart Meal has also been launched
- Better choice in a food category (salt, total fat/ fat quality)
- In some food categories also fibre, sugar and cholesterol)
- Food group based criteria available: <http://www.sydanmerkki.fi>



Criteria for the Finnish "Heart symbol"

Bread and cereal products

Bread and cereal products are an important source of carbohydrates and fibre. The criterion of the Heart Symbol is especially the salt content, because bread is a notable source of sodium. For sodium the criteria correspond to low-sodium limits set by food laws. In some cereal products there is plenty of fat and hard fat, therefore the criteria include also fat. The criterion for hard fat follows the national nutrition guidelines.

| Product groups | Criteria relating to product groups |
|--|---|
| Bread | Fat \leq 5 g/100g Sodium \leq 280 mg/100g Fibre \geq 5 g/100 g |
| Crisp bread, Finn crisps | Fat \leq 5 g/100 g Sodium \leq 480 mg/100g Fibre \geq 10 g/100 g |
| Pastry (sweet and salted), biscuits and crackers | Fat \leq 25 % of energy Hard fat \leq 33 % of fat Sodium \leq 280 mg/100g Sugars \leq 20 g/100 g |
| Breakfast cereals | Fat \leq 5 g/100 g, or if fat content 5.1-10 g/100g, hard fat \leq 33 % of fat Sodium \leq 400 mg/100g Sugars \leq 16 g/100 g Fibre \geq 6 g/100 g |
| Pasta, rice and similar products | Fibre \geq 6 g/100 g (dry weight) |

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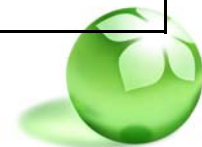


Criteria for the Finnish "Heart symbol"

Meat products

The purpose is to decrease the intake of total fat i.e. the intake of invisible fat. At the same time the intake of hard fat decreases as well. Some meat products may contain high amount of cholesterol; therefore a cholesterol limit has been set. It is based on the recommended maximum intake of cholesterol.

| Product groups | Criteria relating to product groups |
|---|---|
| Whole meat products | Fat \leq 4 g/100 g Sodium \leq 800 mg/100g |
| Cold cut sausages and other sausages to be cooked | Fat \leq 12 g/100 g Hard fat \leq 40 % of fat Sodium \leq 600 mg/100g Cholesterol \leq 100 mg/100g |



Conclusions and future challenges

- Reducing salt intake in the population requires long-lasting, systematic work
- National legislation works – especially setting maximum salt levels for normal products
- Consumer education is very important
- Overall agreement within Europe would help - food travels
- Loopholes: unpackaged products have no labels and no requirement to show the ingredients – the case of imported, highly salted dough (“Eurobread”)

