

# More action is needed to lower salt and sugar consumption in Fiji



Our recent survey\* found that people know that eating too much salt and sugar is related to poor health, and say they are taking action to reduce salt and sugar consumption.

**Salt**



- 82% of people knew that high salt intake increased risk of hypertension
- 82% of people said it was somewhat or very important to lower their salt intake
- 58% of people reported trying to lower their salt intake

**Sugar**



- 92% of people knew that high sugar intake increased risk of diabetes
- 84% of people said lowering sugar intake was somewhat or very important
- 65% reported actively trying to reduce sugar intake

## Reasons why further policy interventions are needed

Despite these high levels of knowledge, not all reported behaviours were good:



**60%** of people reported adding sugar to beverages daily



**17%** reported drinking sugar sweetened beverages daily

## People are still eating far too much salt and sugar

**9g/day** Salt intake is around 9g/day, more than double the maximum recommended amount by the World Health Organization.



Everyone is eating too much salt. For some people, salt consumption is even higher than other people.



Men, younger people, and iTaukei Fijians are eating more salt than women, older people and Indian/other Fijians

**74g/day** Free sugar intake is 74g/day, over 3 times the 'ideal' amount recommended by the World Health Organization.



Free sugar intake (excludes sugar from milk, fruit, and vegetables) is estimated at 16% of total energy intake.



Sugar intake is higher for: iTaukei Fijians than Indian/other Fijians



younger compared to older people.

## Main food sources of salt and sugar



**SALT** mixed cooked dishes (things like curries and stews) and bread and bakery products.



**SUGAR** sugar added to drinks, sugar sweetened beverages and bread and bakery products. **Almost half of the sugar in diets came from sugar in drinks or added to drinks.**

## What the findings highlight

- Interventions to reduce salt and sugar consumption** need to target both individual behaviour and the food environment.
- Food environments need to be healthier**, so that the most affordable, accessible, and easy choice is also the healthiest.
- Food policy interventions** such as working with food retailers to change the design of their outlets or raising taxes on foods high in salt and sugar are needed to change food environments.
- Behaviour change campaigns** urging people not to add salt and sugar to food and beverages should also be considered.

## Next steps

These findings will be used to advocate for increased support for implementation of strategies laid out in Fiji's Wellness Plan and upcoming national multisectoral NCD prevention policy.

# Food insecurity and poor health in Fiji



Our recent survey\* found a high proportion of participants had experienced food insecurity in the last year.



## Food security

is the availability and access to sufficient healthy and affordable food and is a human right.



## Food insecurity

is associated with inadequate nutrition and with increased rates of chronic diseases.



**3/4 of people surveyed have experienced one or more indicators of food insecurity**



**44%** say that they have experienced **not having enough food for balanced meals**.



**Nearly 1/5th** say that they have run out of basic foods (17%), have had to have smaller meals or skip meals (19%) or limit variety (19%), **due to lack of money**.



**13%** say they have had to rely on others to provide money for food and **10%** said they **relied on special food vouchers**.



A similar number of people say they are **stressed because of not enough money for food** (20%) or because they can't meet demands for social/cultural/religious occasions (19%) or because they can't afford balanced meals for their children (16%).

## COVID-19 had significant impacts on people's food security



**70%** of people said that they had **become more food insecure due to COVID-19** but most people were taking positive steps to address this



Most people said that they **made a home garden** (68%) or grew more fruits and vegetables (60%).



Just over one third (**34%**) reported **stocking up on food** more than normal.



Around **15%** said that they tried to **eat more "health" foods**.



**10%** reported **eating less** than they normally would because of COVID-related food shortages.

## What the findings highlight

- 1** The survey highlights the **need for sustainable interventions** to reduce levels of food insecurity in Fiji.
- 2** **Interventions to improve dietary intake** should be aligned with programs to address food insecurity.
- 3** There is an **opportunity to build on the positive changes in behaviour** due to COVID-19 to improve both food security and fruit and vegetable intakes.

## Next steps

More comprehensive food (and water) security surveys are needed to strengthen and monitor ongoing and future policy initiatives.

### \*About the survey

The survey was led by FNU, with support from The George Institute for Global Health to establish baseline estimates of salt and sugar intake and food insecurity in the central division of Fiji. This survey is part of the 'Scaling-up food policy interventions' project, a partnership between FNU, The George Institute for Global Health, University of Sydney, and Deakin University, and conducted in a collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The project aims to improve implementation of evidence-based interventions to reduce salt and sugar intake in Fiji.

For further information please contact Assistant Professor Gade Waqa at Fiji National University at [gade.waqa@fnu.ac.fj](mailto:gade.waqa@fnu.ac.fj)

Design: The George Institute for Global Health