Considering the high levels of processed food intake in Europe, reformulating food products to improve their nutritional properties can help create healthier food environments and reduce the impacts of diet-related health conditions, such as obesity.

This review investigated the impact of food reformulation on food choices, nutrient intake and health status.

Behaviour and choices
The review found that people usually accept, buy and consume reformulated products, resulting in an overall improvement in the nutritional composition of food purchases.

Reformulation towards less sugar or more fibre tended to be more often noticed and less accepted by consumers, while salt-reduction has higher acceptance.

Nutrient intake
Overall, food reformulation tends to lead to improved nutritional intakes. Analysing studies from Europe and the US, the review found that daily population-wide salt intake after reformulation was 0.57g lower than before.

Product reformulation to reduce trans-fatty acid (TFA) content also results in reduced TFA intake. An overall decrease in intake between 38% - 85% were reported in North America, Costa Rica and the United Kingdom.

The review could not identify studies assessing the impacts of reformulation for other nutrients, like sugar, or for total energy.

Health status
The review found that a ban on TFAs in processed and restaurant foods has led to a reduced mortality from cardiovascular disease in Austria, Denmark, Costa Rica and the US. Mortality was reduced by 4.3% - 6.2%.

One British study on sodium reduction in foods showed a positive effect on blood pressure.

Only three studies investigated the effect of reformulation on children and adolescents, finding similar results as for adults.

Effective reformulation strategies should:
- Be accepted by consumers
- Not lead to compensation of reduced nutrients
- Include a wide variety of products
- Cover food categories that are major sources of targeted nutrients
- Not lead to additional products being placed on the market

Other findings include:
- Mandatory standards are more effective than voluntary actions
- Out-of-home foods are promising targets for reformulation policies
- Multi-component strategies that include food reformulation are more promising to improve population diets than reformulation alone


Find out more about the STOP project here: stopchildobesity.eu
Impact of food reformulation on food choices, nutrient intake and health

Salt and trans-fatty acid reformulation

- accepted by consumers
- improved daily nutrient intake
- positive health changes

Food reformulation is most effective as part of a multi-component strategy and includes mandatory standards

Future research should focus on:

- sugar and fibre reformulation
- whole diets rather than single nutrients
- consumer acceptance
- children

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STOP (Science and Technology in childhood Obesity Policy)
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