The Bread Audit Report 2024

The Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council

Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council

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THE BREAD AUDIT

Bread is a core food and a staple in many countries worldwide.

In Australia, bread is frequently fortified with micronutrients to address nutrient deficiencies and serves as an accessible option to boost whole grain intake[1].

Whole grains are cereal foods containing the entire intact germ, bran, and endosperm. They can improve gastrointestinal health and reduce the risk of common health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus[2].

Unfortunately, Australians aren't eating enough of them.

While the Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend six servings of grains daily, focusing on whole grains, most Australians consume less than four servings a day, with fewer than one-third of grain intake coming from whole grains[3].

No matter how you slice it, bread can be a convenient way to increase whole grain consumption. However, according to the Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council's (GLNC) latest bread category audit in November 2023, not all breads are created equal.

This report will examine the state of the Australian bread market and identify the trends and challenges that influence whole grain and bread consumption.

WHAT IS A BREAD AUDIT?

The GLNC conducted an audit of bread products in November 2023 across four major retailers (Coles, Woolworths, Aldi, and Independent Grocers of Australia) and Bakers Delight in metropolitan Sydney, Australia. The last bread audit GLNC conducted took place in 2021.

The audit tracks category changes and analyses the nutritional composition, ingredients, packaging claims, and the total number of products eligible for a whole grain claim in line with The Code*.

The Code

To guide the use of whole grain content ingredient claims on food labels in Australia and New Zealand, the GLNC led the development of the voluntary Code of Practice for whole grain ingredient content claims (The Code).

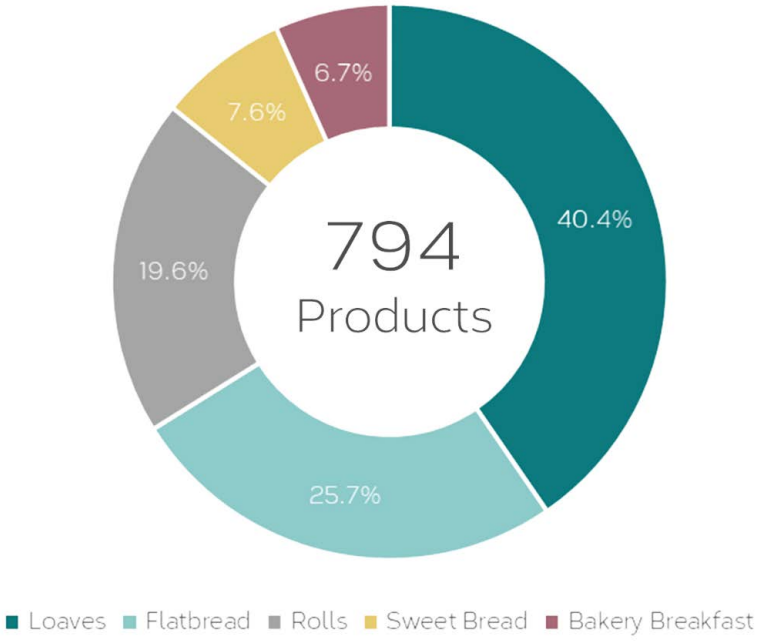
The Code was developed as a mechanism for the food industry to aid consumers in their decision-making of whole grain foods. It aims to help Australian consumers meet the recommended Daily Target Intake (DTI) of 48 grams per day for adults and children nine years or older, following the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) recommendation of six serves of core grain food per day.

The Code sets out principles for making whole grain ingredient content claims based on industry-endorsed minimum whole grain content levels of:

- At least 8 grams per manufacturer serve (contains whole grain)
- At least 16 grams per manufacturer serve (high in whole grain)
- At least 24 grams per manufacturer serve (very high in whole grain)

KEY FINDINGS

There are 794 bread products available across the following categories.



Overall, there are 15.7 per cent fewer breads on the shelf than in 2021, with loaves comprising the greatest proportion, followed by flatbreads.

NUTRITION

This section will highlight key nutrients.

Protein

Did you know wheat is a source of protein? Wheat contributes to bread's overall nutritional content and can enhance its protein content[4].

The average protein content of all bread products has increased by 6.7 per cent since 2021, with nearly half of all bread products being a good source of protein (≥5g per serving).

Notably, flatbreads and loaves have the highest average protein content.

- Flatbread and loaves have the highest average protein content.
- Burger rolls have the highest protein content, followed by wraps.
- On average, crumpets have the lowest protein content (4.9g per 100g).

Dietary Fibre

Dietary fibre is linked to improved gastrointestinal health, lowered blood cholesterol, and reduced risk of chronic conditions[5]. Despite these benefits, many Australians fall short of meeting their recommended dietary fibre intake[6]. Bread can be a great source of dietary fibre, helping fill this nutrient gap.

The average dietary fibre of bread slightly increased since 2021, with nearly one-quarter of bread products being a 'source of fibre' (≥2g-<4g per serve).

From 2021 to 2023, the average dietary fibre content of flatbreads increased by 25.0 per cent.

- Wraps have the highest average fibre content (8.4g per 100g), whereas crumpets have the lowest (2.3g per 100g).
- The average dietary fibre content of bread rolls are 20.7 per cent lower than bread loaves.
- Nearly one-quarter (23.2 per cent) of bread products are a 'source of fibre' (≥2g-<4g per serve).

Saturated Fat

Bread is generally not a significant source of saturated fat. However, the saturated fat content of bread can vary depending on the type of flour used and additional ingredients incorporated.

While three-quarters of all bread products are considered ‘low in saturated fat’ (≤1.5g per 100g), there has been an overall increase in the saturated fat level of bread, with sweet breads having the highest average saturated fat content.

Flatbreads have had a 15.0 per cent increase in saturated fat content, while bread rolls have the highest proportion of products that are classified as 'low in saturated fat'.

The average saturated fat content of bread products increased across all categories.

Sweet breads have the highest average saturated fat content.

Three-quarters (76.6 per cent) of all bread products are ‘low in saturated fat’ (≤1.5g per 100g).

Sugar

Dietary guidelines recommend limited sugar intake. However, sugar is required in bread for taste and fermentation[7].

Over three-quarters of bread products are 'low in sugar' (≤5g per 100g), with over 90 per cent of loaves, flatbreads and rolls falling into this category.

The average sugar content of products increased in 4 out of 5 bread categories.

- Fruit bread has the highest average sugar content (20.4g per 100g) due to the added dried fruit content.
- The average sugar content of sweet breads is 5.5 times higher than bread loaves.
- Over three-quarters (84.8 per cent) of bread products are 'low in sugar' (≤5g per 100g).

Sodium

Bread requires some sodium for taste, preservation, and texture.

The sodium content in bread decreased in four out of five categories. Only 3.0 per cent (24) of products are ' low sodium' (≤120mg per 100g).

- Flatbreads have the greatest proportion (4.9 per cent) of products that are ' low sodium' (≤120mg per 100g).
- Crumpets have the highest average sodium content.
- Bakery breakfast products contain 6.1 per cent more sodium than the category average.

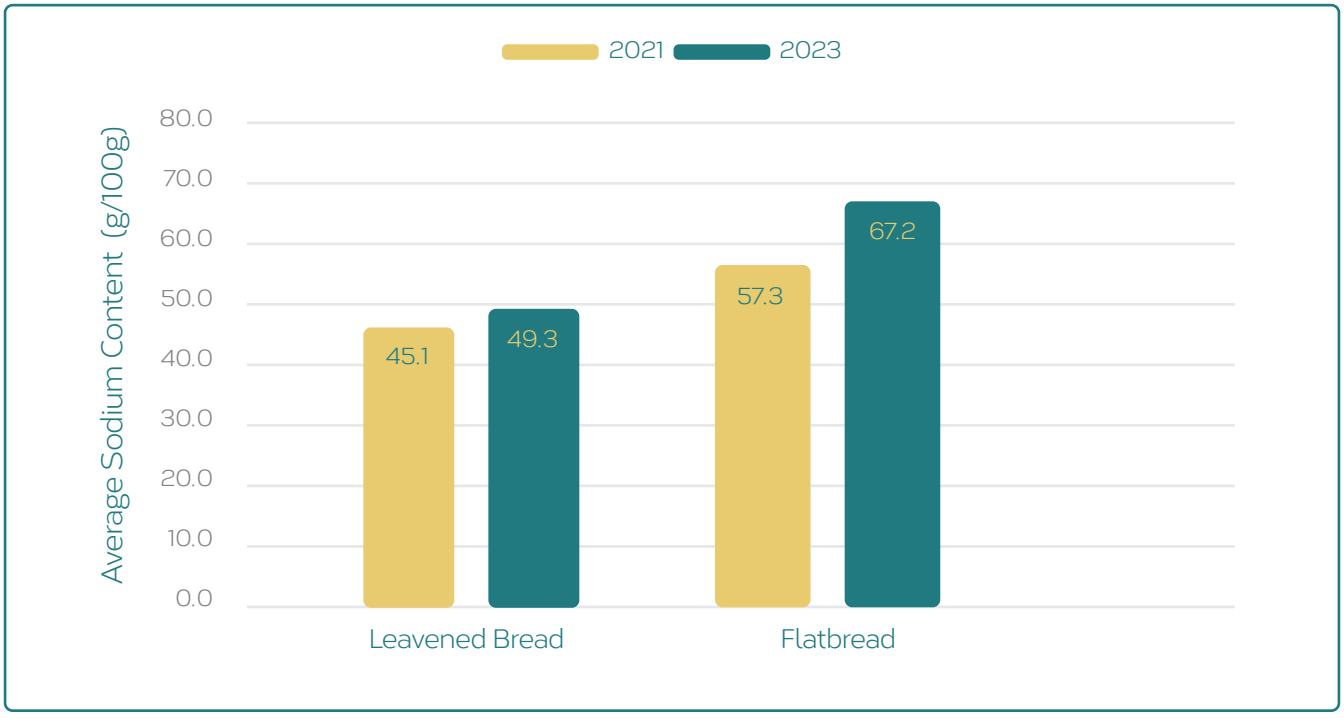
Sodium

Healthy Food Partnerships (HFP) collaborates with governments, the public health sector, and the food industry to promote healthy eating habits among Australians. As part of this initiative, the HFP has set targets for reducing the consumption of certain nutrients, including sodium.

The HFP target for leavened bread is 380mg of sodium per 100g, and the target for flatbread is 450mg per 100g.

Bread's sodium content has decreased in four out of five categories, with 9.2 per cent more bread products meeting the HFP targets than in 2021.

While just under half of leavened bread products meet the HFP target, two-thirds of flatbreads meet the HFP reformulation target, a 15.8 per cent increase since 2021.

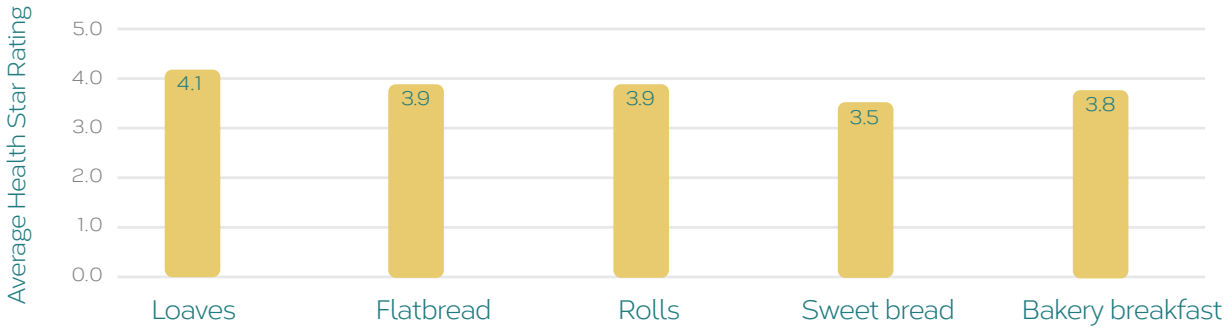


- Just under half (49.3 per cent) - of bread products meet the leavened breads HFP reformulation targets - <380mg per 100g.
- There is a 15.8 per cent increase in the number of flatbread products that meet the HFP reformulation target - <450mg per 100g.

HEALTH STAR RATING

Despite being a core food group, just over a third of bread products display a health star rating.

Among products with a health star rating, the most displayed rating is 4 stars, followed by 3.5 stars, meaning that bread is generally considered a healthy food option[9].



In Australia, the Health Star Rating is in place to help consumers make informed food choices. The current Health Star Rating algorithm doesn' t consider whole grain content, it considers dietary fibre. However, dietary fibre isn' t a sufficient proxy for whole grains, as whole grains offer benefits beyond dietary fibre[2].

As the Australian dietary guidelines encourage whole grain consumption, incorporating whole grains into the algorithm would ensure the rating system aligns with guideline recommendations and improves consumers' ability to make choices that align with current guidelines[17].

TRENDS IN THE BREAD MARKET

Plant-Based

Plant-based claims are now displayed in the most significant proportion on bread packs compared to any other claim, with nearly half of all bread products displaying a variation of this claim.

There has been a significant increase in individuals adopting a plant-based dietary pattern, with one in three Australians consciously limiting their meat consumption to some extent[10]. This shift has influenced the bread category and claims.

Gut Health

Gut health has been a dominant trend, with evidence highlighting its crucial role in supporting digestion, immune function, mood, and general well-being[11].

While there are 20 per cent fewer gut health claims than in 2021, dietary fibre claims have increased and are now displayed on over one-third of products.

The gut health trend isn't going away, but it is being reshaped, with natural prebiotic-rich ingredients like BARLEYMAX® increasingly being called out on the front of pack.

TRENDS IN THE BREAD MARKET

Natural and Artisanal

Although the increasing cost of living is causing consumers to be more mindful of their spending habits, according to Mintel 2022, premium varieties of bread continue to attract some consumers as affordable treats[12]. Artisan-style breads, particularly sourdough breads, often boast naturalness and resonate with consumers looking for authentic, wholesome products.

These breads typically contain fewer additives and preservatives than other bread varieties, aligning with consumer preferences for more straightforward and transparent ingredient lists.

Sustainability

Sustainability claims are increasing on packs, with more products calling out sustainable production practices, recycling instructions, and ingredient sourcing. According to Mintel 2023, increased efforts to introduce new wheat varieties and other sustainable ingredients, such as fava beans, will move into the spotlight[13].

Given that bread is one of the most wasted food items, upcycling is expected to be part of the solution. More companies will likely explore upcycled ingredients as part of their sustainability strategies.

WHITE, MULTIGRAIN AND WHOLE GRAIN: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

White bread, refined to exclude the bran and germ, has a fine texture and light colour. This refining process removes many nutrients.

Multigrain bread has no proper definition but is typically made from a mix of refined and whole wheat flour with added grains. It tends to be higher in fibre and has a lower glycaemic index than white bread but is not as nutrient-rich as whole grain bread.

Whole grain bread retains all parts of the grain, including the germ, bran and endosperm. This results in a denser texture and darker colour. Whole grain bread contains dietary fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

Whole Grain Bread

Whole grain bread is higher in protein and dietary fibre and lower in sodium than refined grain varieties. Unfortunately, only 17 per cent of breads are considered whole grain according to the Code.

Nutrients per 100g	Whole Grain n=135	Refined Grain n=659
Energy (kJ)	1047.1	1106.5
Protein (g)	9.9	9.0
Saturated fat (g)	1.0	1.3
Carbohydrate (g)	39.4	43.6
Sugar (g)	3.0	3.8
Dietary Fibre (g)	6.7	5.2
Sodium (mg)	394.0	416.2

WHAT CAN WE DO TO INCREASE WHOLE GRAIN CONSUMPTION?

Including Whole Grains on the Shelf and Pack

01 Whole Grain Claims

Many Australian consumers find it challenging to identify whole grain options, and the limited number of whole grain breads with a whole grain claim are a contributing factor[14]. Only 17.0 per cent of breads meet The Code criteria for whole grain claims, and just 95 products feature a visible whole grain claim.

Compared to GLNC's last bread audit, there has been a decline in both the availability of whole grain breads and whole grain claims made on packaging.

In contrast, the United States has seen an increase in bread products with a whole grain claim, including a Whole Grain Stamp created by the Oldways Whole Grains Council[15]. A recent survey showed that this stamp helps consumers effectively identify whole grain products and is preferred by many[15].

Increasing the availability of products and including whole grain claims on pack are crucial steps in helping Australian consumers choose whole grains. Manufacturers can adopt front-of-pack claims like the GLNC Whole Grain Content Claim Logo on pack to support consumers in making these decisions. However, such initiatives are only effective if whole grain products are widely accessible.

GLNC Whole Grain Content Claim Logo

02 Carbohydrates

Misinformation surrounding the healthiness of bread is widespread, with many consumers falsely believing that bread is unhealthy[18]. This misconception often stems from exaggerated claims in media and diet trends that vilify carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates are the body and brain's primary source of energy. High-quality carbohydrates, including whole grain breads, can offer numerous nutritional benefits. They are rich in fibre, vitamins, and minerals and can contribute to improved heart health, digestive function and weight management when consumed as part of a balanced diet[19].

Correcting this misinformation is vital to ensuring consumers make informed dietary choices and understand that bread can be a valuable and nutritious component of a healthy eating pattern.

03 Ultra-Processing

Ultra-processing refers to the processing of food products, often involving adding ingredients and using advanced technological methods.

Processing is necessary to make bread edible and safe for consumption; basic processing steps such as milling grains into flour, fermenting dough, and baking are essential for transforming raw ingredients into a palatable and safe product.

Some international dietary guidelines discourage the consumption of ultra-processed foods. However, foods high in whole grains may not have the adverse health effects previously observed for ultra-processed foods[20]. It's essential to consider the health benefits of processed whole grain foods in promoting healthy dietary patterns and enhancing overall diet quality.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The bread audit provides valuable insights into the state of the Australian bread market.

While there are some improvements in the nutritional content of bread products, there is still room for growth, particularly around the proportion of whole grain breads available.

By prioritising the inclusion of whole grain breads and increasing education about the importance of whole grains, we can take proactive steps towards improving public health outcomes in Australia.

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ABOUT THE GRAINS & LEGUMES NUTRITION COUNCIL

The Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council (GLNC) is a not-for-profit health promotion charity and the independent authority on the nutrition and health benefits of grains and legumes.

Grains & Legumes Nutrition Council

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