

Food app to fight nation's killers

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A revolutionary smartphone app launched today will empower New Zealand shoppers to make healthier food choices - reducing their risk of dying early from two of the nation's biggest killers, heart attack and stroke.

In three easy steps, New Zealand consumers can reduce excessively high levels of fat, salt and sugar in their families' diets and share shopping lists with friends via social media.

FoodSwitch allows users to scan the barcode of packaged foods using their Smartphone camera and receive immediate, easy to understand [nutritional advice](#) and see healthier choices.

The app was originally developed in Australia by The George Institute for Global Health and tailored for New Zealand shoppers by The National Institute for Health Innovation (NIHI) at The University of Auckland.

The release of FoodSwitch New Zealand is the result of several years of research by pre-eminent food and health policy experts from The George Institute and The University of Auckland, and launched in partnership with Bupa, one of New Zealand's leading healthcare organisations.

Importantly, the app displays healthier choices based on the [nutritional value](#) of more than 8,000 packaged food products found in New Zealand supermarkets.

New Zealand shoppers will be encouraged to help increase the number of products by sending photos of packaged foods not in the database.

Foodswitch prompts users to take three photos of the product's packaging and researchers will use these photos to add the missing product to the FoodSwitch app database.

"FoodSwitch's three step approach combines the latest technology with [cutting edge research](#). New Zealanders can now scan barcodes, see what's in a food, and switch to a [healthier choice](#) in an instant," says Dr Helen Eyles, researcher and [nutritionist](#) at NIHI.

Dr Eyles says heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other diseases, largely caused by poor diets, are the biggest killers in New Zealand.

"Choosing a healthier diet has to be made easier, because good eating habits are one of the best and most cost-effective ways to prevent disease," says Dr Eyles.

"For too long, people have been bewildered by confusing food labels" says Associate Professor Cliona Ni Mhurchu who leads NIHI's nutrition research programme. "Research shows that people like traffic light labels and can use them to make healthier [food](#) choices. FoodSwitch aims to make it easier for all New Zealanders to make healthier choices about the foods they eat".

Bupa's Managing Director, Gráinne Moss, says "We are delighted and excited to be bringing the FoodSwitch to New Zealand as it supports Bupa's purpose of helping people live longer, healthier, happier lives by improving New Zealand families' diets with a simple, practical tool."

The original Australian version of FoodSwitch was recently recognised as one of the world's top 100 innovative initiatives at the international

2013 Sustainia launch event. FoodSwitch was selected from entries spanning more than 79 countries and acknowledged for its efforts to help Australians make healthier [food choices](#) and reduce their risk of [heart attack](#) and stroke.

FoodSwitch is available on iOS and Android smartphones, and can be downloaded for free on the New Zealand Apple iTunes and Google Play stores, or via the app store on their device.

For more information, or to download the [app](#), go to www.facebook.com/FoodSwitch or www.foodswitch.co.nz

Provided by University of Auckland

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