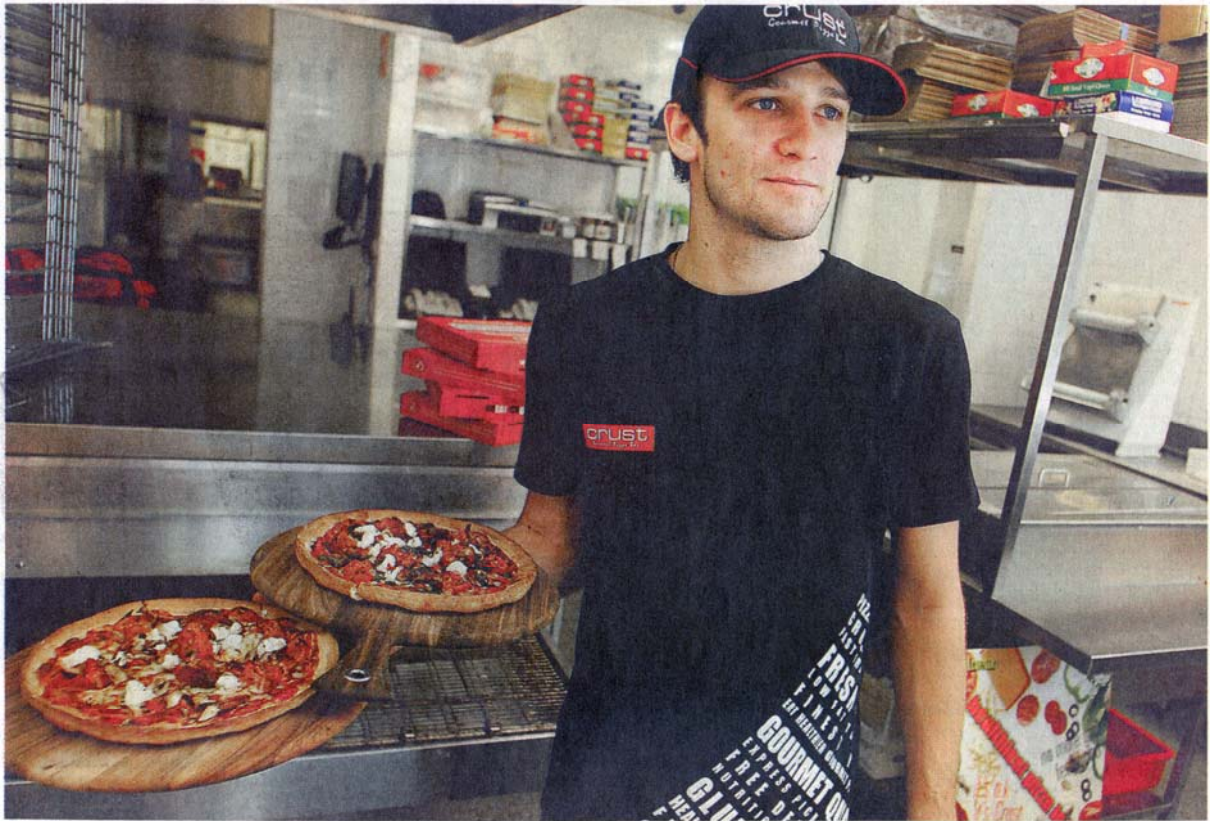




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Top toppings: Scott Jones, manager of the Crust Gourmet Pizza Bar in Armadale, with two heart-tick pizza choices.

PICTURE: PAUL ROVERE

# Fat pizza no laughing matter for health-conscious

By JILL STARK  
 MEDICAL REPORTER

SMOTHERED in cheese, piled high with processed meat and packed full of salt — it's a meal that should come with a government health warning.

But while burgers and fries cop the blame for the obesity crisis, the humble pizza slice has escaped the spotlight. Until now.

In a quest to reduce the nation's waistlines, the Heart Foundation is waging war against major pizza chains. With Australians devouring a whopping 190 million takeaway pizzas every year, the industry stands accused of fuelling the obesity epidemic by promoting triple-meat options and crusts stuffed with extra cheese.

A Heart Foundation analysis of Pizza Hut and Domino's menus found the average pizza contained more than five grams of salt and 20 grams of saturated fat — a person's entire daily allowance in one meal.

It comes as a small family-run pizza chain today becomes the first in the industry to receive a Heart Foundation tick for six menu choices.

Crust Gourmet pizzas were found to have a third of the salt and saturated fat levels of major chains, and contained 80% of daily recommended fibre.

The 25-centimetre pizzas are made with a wholegrain base, healthier olive oil and reduced fat cheese. No processed meat is used and high-salt options such as anchovies and olives have been eliminated.

It's a far cry from Domino's double bacon cheeseburger pizza, which is bursting with beef and bacon, drenched in mayonnaise and has more than 10 grams of fat a slice.

Susan Anderson, food strategy director for the Heart Foundation, said Crust had set a benchmark for the bigger operators, who needed to lift their game.

"It's critical that the rest of the industry has a look at their

CRUST (Heart Tick approved) ROAST CHICKEN Per pizza (440g)	DOMINO'S CLASSIC CHICKEN MONACO Per Pizza (504g)	PIZZA HUT PAN CRUST BBQ CHICKEN Per Pizza (405g)
Energy (kJ) <b>3648</b>	Energy (kJ) <b>4632</b>	Energy (kJ) <b>4228</b>
Fat (total) (g) <b>15</b>	Fat (total) (g) <b>44.4</b>	Fat (total) (g) <b>27</b>
Saturated fat (g) <b>5.3</b>	Saturated fat (g) <b>20.7</b>	Saturated fat (g) <b>11</b>
Sodium (mg) <b>880</b>	Sodium (mg) <b>2087</b>	Sodium (mg) <b>2081</b>
Fibre (g) <b>24.2</b>	Fibre (g) <b>20.1</b>	Fibre (g) <b>7.3</b>



practices and start to improve their offerings because we were horrified by what we found with the two major chains. The saturated fat and salt levels are so high you can basically blow your entire day's allowance in one meal," she said.

"We often see promotions of more cheese and stuffed crust and double or triple the amount of processed meat topping. This industry is definitely contributing to our weight issues in

Australia and it's time for a shake-up."

Eating foods high in salt and saturated fat increases the risk of chronic health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. The risks are heightened for people with weight problems. "People who are obese tend to have high blood pressure anyway so it becomes a combined impact of a high salt diet plus a high calorie diet — it really is a lethal

mixture," Ms Anderson said.

Recent Heart Foundation research found that eight out of 10 people wanted healthier choices when eating out and 86% wanted a pizza chain with a heart tick.

Almost a year since fast-food giant McDonald's received ticks for nine meals, the move seems to have paid off. According to a Heart Foundation study, one in five McDonald's patrons has switched to a tick-approved meal.

Costa Anastasiadis, founder of Crust — which now has 16 shops around Australia and was recently ranked 18th in *BRW's* 60 fastest-growing franchises — said he expected the healthy pizzas to be big sellers.

"So many Australians consume takeaway food every day and when you look at the major chains and the independents there's not really anyone addressing the obesity issue," he said.

Pizza Hut and Domino's did not return calls from *The Age*.