

Consensus Action on Salt and Health / CASH.

Contributors

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

Consensus Action on Salt and Health

“There is now overwhelming evidence to show that a high salt diet leads to high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease.”

“Stroke, heart failure and heart disease account for just under half of all deaths in the UK and are the UK's biggest killers.”



Charity Registration No. 1098818

Salt and Health

A high salt diet is linked to high blood pressure, which is the main cause of heart attacks and strokes. Our high salt diet can have other adverse effects such as osteoporosis, cancer of the stomach and aggravation of asthma.

In 2003 the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition *Salt and Health* report confirmed previous advice that reducing current salt consumption by one-third, from around 9 grams/day to no more than 6 grams/day, would have significant public health benefits by reducing average population blood pressure levels.

This report, for the first time, set recommendations for target levels of salt intake for children, according to age (www.sacn.gov.uk). There is now evidence to show that a higher salt intake leads to higher blood pressure in children as well as adults. (He, 2007 Hypertension 48: 861-869)

Today the evidence regarding salt and blood pressure is even stronger with the latest Cochrane Review on the effect of longer-term modest salt reduction on blood pressure showing a significant relationship between the reduction in urinary sodium and the reduction in blood pressure. (He, The Cochrane Library 2006, Issue 3)

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Department of Health (DoH) both support the need to reduce salt intake. The FSA initiated their own salt reduction advertising campaign in 2004 and set voluntary salt targets for industry in 85 food categories in March 2006.

Cutting our salt intake in the UK is vital, as research has shown that people who are able to reduce their salt intake by around 2.5g per day can reduce their risk of having a stroke or heart attack by one quarter. (Cook, BMJ 2007; 334:885)

For every 1g of salt we can cut out of our national average intake in the UK, we will save over 6,500 lives each year. We will also prevent a further 6,500 heart attacks and strokes each year. (He, 2003 Hypertension 42: 1093-1099)

Hidden salt

The main source of salt in the UK diet is salt added during food processing and to restaurant and catered food. These sources account for around **80%** of our salt intake. Processed foods that are either high in salt, or frequently consumed and therefore contributing to our salt intake, include: bread and bread products; breakfast cereals; meat products; ready-prepared meals; sandwiches and other foods bought outside the home such as takeaways. Many people are unaware of these sources of hidden salt.

Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH)

Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) is a registered charity and comprises an independent group of specialists concerned with salt and its effects on health. It is successfully working to reach a consensus with the food industry and Government over the harmful effects of a high salt diet, and to bring about a reduction in the amount of salt in processed foods by manufacturers, retailers and the food service sector as well as salt added to cooking, and at the table.

We organise **National Salt Awareness Week** in January every year which aims to highlight the dangers of high salt intake and provide practical information on where this salt comes from in the UK diet. The campaign involves the national media and health care professionals in the community. During the Week a reception is held at the House of Commons targeted at key decision makers in the Government, health organisations, NGOs and the food industry.

Why CASH?

CASH was set up in 1996 following the rejection by the Government of an expert committee's recommendation to reduce salt intake and claims by the food industry at this time that the evidence about salt was not clear.

We countered these claims with a wealth of scientific evidence which clearly links high salt intake to raised blood pressure and other adverse effects on health. Now both the DoH and the FSA both back the need for a reduction in salt intake across the whole UK population. At the same time, we were able to persuade many of the major supermarkets and food manufacturers to adopt a policy of gradually reducing the salt content of their products and this strategy has now been adopted very successfully by the Food Standards Agency.

Our aims

- To reach a consensus with the food manufacturers and suppliers that there is strong evidence that salt is a major cause of high blood pressure and has other adverse health effects
- To persuade the food processors and suppliers to universally and gradually reduce the salt content of processed foods
- To ensure the body of evidence from the scientific community about the dangers of excessive salt consumption becomes translated into policy by the Government and relevant professional organisations
- To educate the public in becoming more salt aware in terms of understanding the impact of salt on their health, checking labels when shopping and avoiding products with high levels of salt
- To ensure that the elderly and children are highlighted as particularly vulnerable groups whose health are more at risk from high salt intakes
- To ensure clear and comprehensive nutritional labelling of the salt content of all processed foods, with the amount in grams of salt per serving provided alongside the recommended maximum intake of 6 grams a day
- To work with other organisations and stakeholders in order to maximise the message about a healthy diet ensuring advice includes reducing the nation's current high salt intake.

Salt reduction around the world

World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) was established in 2005 and is a global group with its headquarters in the UK, with the mission to improve the health of populations throughout the world by achieving a gradual reduction in salt intake. WASH will encourage multi-national food companies to reduce salt in their products and will work with Governments in different countries highlighting the need for a population salt reduction strategy. The overall aim is to bring about a reduction in salt intake throughout the world by reducing the amount of salt in processed foods, as well as salt added to cooking and at the table.

So far WASH has **301 members** from **71 countries**. Members are mainly experts in hypertension, however some have other roles as well - but all have an interest in reducing salt intake in their individual countries. In April 2007, a World Health Organisation (WHO) report on reducing salt intake in populations also called for legislation if the food industry does not reduce salt (WHO, 2006).

The UK is leading the world on salt reduction. The WHO Salt Action Network, which aims to share experiences on salt reduction efforts between the 11 member countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Ireland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Spain), is led by the UK, via the FSA. The network aims to become the centre of expertise for salt reduction.

What can you do and what advice should you give?

- **Don't add salt to cooking or at the table.** Within 2-3 weeks your taste receptors become much more sensitive and you'll soon find the food tastes terrific and high salt foods become unpleasant.
- **Compare products and choose those with less salt.** As a guide, 1.5 grams of salt (or 0.6g sodium) per 100g or more is a lot of salt, whereas 0.3 grams of salt (or 0.1g sodium) or less per 100g is low in salt.
- **Eat less processed and convenience foods (e.g. breakfast cereals, ready meals and pizzas).** Foods that are unprocessed contain far less salt. If possible cook meals from scratch using fresh ingredients and don't add extra salt.
- **Write to food manufacturers** to ensure all processed foods are clearly labelled with the salt content per portion using multiple traffic light front of pack labelling. You can also ask them to reduce the amount of total salt in their foods.
- **Complain if you find that foods eaten away from home are too salty.**
- **Make sure you are up to date with the latest research on the effects of salt.** For the latest information visit: www.actiononsalt.org.uk; www.salt.gov.uk; www.bpassoc.org.uk and www.bhf.org.uk

If you would like more information, to order resources or would like to make a donation to the work of CASH visit our website at **www.actiononsalt.org.uk**



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Email: cash@sgul.ac.uk