

Reducing salt; saving lives



Salt damages your health

Raised blood pressure is the biggest cause of death in the world (7million deaths a year) and is responsible for two thirds of strokes and half of all heart disease.

Salt is the major factor that puts up our blood pressure.

We are all eating too much salt

Small amounts of salt (sodium and chloride) are essential for our wellbeing. Adults need less than 1 gram of salt per day. However we all eat much more than is required: salt intakes range from 8 to 18 grams a day around the world, hence we have a global epidemic of blood pressure-related disease.



Why 5g?

Adults should consume less than 5g per day, about a level teaspoon. This target was designed to have the maximum effect on blood pressure, but also as a practical target for the food industry and consumers to achieve.

The WHO set this worldwide target of 5g in 1983, which was further endorsed in 2003, 2006 and 2012.

Worldwide, it is estimated that a reduction of 6g/day in salt intake would prevent approximately 2.5 million stroke and coronary heart disease deaths a year¹. A 15% reduction in low and middle income countries over 10 years would save more than 8.5 million deaths². Over a longer period of time, there would be an even greater effect as it prevents the rise in blood pressure that occurs with age. It is particularly important that children do not eat too much salt, as blood pressure first starts to rise in childhood.

Salt reduction is easy and cheap

Salt reduction is the simplest, most cost effective measure for reducing cardiovascular disease because of its high impact on health, high feasibility and low cost of implementation. Salt reduction has been identified as a priority intervention and listed as a 'best buy' in non communicable disease prevention.

In some countries most of the salt comes from salt added during cooking, at the table and in sauces, in which case simple, but effective, public health campaigns will encourage consumers to eat less salt.

In most countries, 80% of the salt that we eat comes from the foods that we buy, so the consumer has very little choice in how much salt they eat.



The food industry therefore needs to slowly reduce the amount of salt they use. A successful policy has already been pioneered in the UK – most products over the last five years have had salt reduced by 20-30%, saving over 6000 lives per year and resulting in healthcare savings of £1.5billion per year (NICE).

Salt reduction strategies are directed towards the entire population and benefit everyone regardless of age, economic status or ethnicity.

Many countries are now following the UK's lead – and it is vital that a worldwide target is set of 5g a day to save the maximum number of lives.

Our goal in line with the WHO recommended target, is to reduce worldwide salt intake to less than 5g per day for all adults by 2025. Reducing salt intake will save lives at very little cost.

¹ He FJ, MacGregor GA. A comprehensive review on salt and health and current experience of worldwide salt reduction programmes. *J Hum Hypertens* 2009; 23 : 363–84.

² Asaria P, Chisholm D, Mathers C et al. Chronic disease prevention: health effects and financial costs of strategies to reduce salt intake and control tobacco use. *Lancet* 2007; 370: 2044–2053.

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