



# NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 4, March 2009

[www.worldactiononsalt.com](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com)

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## Introduction from Professor MacGregor, Chairman of WASH

World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) was established in October 2005 with the aim of bringing about a gradual reduction in salt intake throughout the world. We encourage and support our expert members in different countries to promote salt reduction by setting up their own local campaigns.

Best wishes,

## WASH NEWS

We are pleased to welcome all new members, and encourage WASH members to spread the invitation to their international colleagues. Please email Katharine Jenner (WASH Coordinator) at [kjenner@sgul.ac.uk](mailto:kjenner@sgul.ac.uk)

WASH membership has now grown to **368** individuals from **80** countries. New members include representatives from: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, India, Italy, Kenya, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and USA. To view an updated members list: [www.worldactiononsalt.com/home/members.htm](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/home/members.htm)

## WORLD SALT AWARENESS WEEK 2009

World Salt Awareness Week was a fantastic success thanks to the hard work and determination of our members.

World Action on Salt and Health held its 2nd annual World Salt Awareness Week (February 2nd - 8th 2009), focusing on **Salt and Eating Out**. We aimed to highlight to the catering industry, chefs and others involved, the importance of adding less salt to food and the long-term health implications of eating a high salt diet.

The Week saw participation from 28 member countries, including: Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Caribbean, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Dubai, Egypt, Finland, Georgia, India, Italy, Kenya, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, Turkey, UK and the USA.

### Map of Participants

[http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/awareness/world\\_salt\\_awareness\\_week\\_2009/map\\_of\\_participants.jpg](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/awareness/world_salt_awareness_week_2009/map_of_participants.jpg)



Activities ranged from involvement from hypertension experts, representatives from the health and education ministries, consumers, the media and the food industry.

For example, Australia's AWASH launched a full national campaign, lead by an event called 'Salt and the City'. Bangladesh and Barbados achieved national media coverage. Bulgaria held a press conference and a series of interviews. Canada launched an advertising campaign. Cuba broadcast the message in city centres. Egypt published the event in journals. Italy issued a press release and distributed posters & leaflets.

Lithuania held a series of TV and radio interviews. Malta held a conference and radio interviews. The Netherlands published a new study on salt intake in children. Poland held a press conference. Saudi Arabia issued brochures & held an exhibition. Serbia held TV interviews and a conference for experts. Slovakia undertook a restaurant survey. South Africa and Turkey held radio and press interviews, and issued a press release. The UK held an event for the government and achieved national media coverage.

A full evaluation will be available to WASH members in April. To provide feedback on World Salt Awareness Activities in your country, please fill out this online questionnaire:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=lcGwNb\\_2bhqSCfmFjwNofaVQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=lcGwNb_2bhqSCfmFjwNofaVQ_3d_3d)

## World Hypertension Day

WASH will be supporting **World Hypertension Day on 17th May 2009**. The theme is 'Salt and blood pressure: Two silent killers'. The event will highlight that:

- High blood pressure is the biggest single cause of death in the world
- Salt is the major factor putting up blood pressure
- If salt intake were halved, it would save approximately 2.5 million lives a year worldwide.

Please look at the website for further information:



<http://www.worldhypertensionleague.org/pages/WHD.aspx>

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## RESEARCH NEWS

### ***Review of salt and health***

In December He and MacGregor published a review on salt and health in the *Journal of Human Hypertension*. The paper examines the relationship between a high salt diet and health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, left ventricular hypertrophy and renal disease. The study shows the risk of CVD is throughout the range of blood pressure, starting at systolic 115mm Hg. The review also looks at the evidence suggesting links between salt intake and obesity, renal stones, osteoporosis and stomach cancer.

In most developed countries, a reduction in salt intake can be achieved by a gradual and sustained reduction in the amount of salt added to food by the food industry. In other countries where most of the salt consumed comes from salt added during cooking or from sauces, a public health campaign is needed to encourage consumers to use less salt. Approaches to implementing salt reduction strategies around the world are discussed in the review, highlighting successful examples from Japan, Finland and the United Kingdom.

[http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/recent\\_press\\_releases.htm](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/recent_press_releases.htm)

FJ He and GA MacGregor; A comprehensive review on salt and health and current experience of worldwide salt reduction programmes. *Journal of Human Hypertension* (2008), 1–22

### ***Salt and hypertension***

Further experimental research has demonstrated the link between small changes in plasma sodium concentrations and hypertension, as characterised by Oberleithner *et al's* 2007 paper on endothelial stiffness<sup>1</sup>. Researchers from the University of Kentucky Medical School and Taishan Medical College report that the activity of an enzyme called nitric oxide synthase (NOS) could be significantly suppressed by high salt levels in the blood<sup>2</sup>.

NOS is the enzyme that produces nitric oxide (NO), a molecule used by the cells lining blood vessels (endothelial cells) to signal surrounding muscle to relax, thereby improving blood flow and reducing blood pressure. The laboratory study used living cells of bovine origin to show that an increase in salt concentration from 137 to 142 mmol/L (ie. 5- mmol/L) resulted in a 25 per cent decrease in NOS activity.

Xiang-An Li, lead author of the study said: "This salt-induced reduction in NO generation in endothelial cells may contribute to the development of hypertension".

1 Oberleithner *et al.* Plasma sodium stiffens vascular endothelium and reduces nitric oxide release. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*. 2007

<http://www.pnas.org/content/104/41/16281.abstract?ck=nck>

2 J. Li *et al.* Salt Inactivates Endothelial Nitric Oxide Synthase in Endothelial Cells. *Journal of Nutrition*. 2009, 139(3):447-451

[http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/archived\\_press\\_releases.htm](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/archived_press_releases.htm)

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## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### **Australia**

Australia World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) has been very active in national salt reduction, making progress at an industry level. AWASH distributed their strategic paper ***Drop the Salt! Food industry Strategy: draft for consultation*** in July 2008. Results of the consultation demonstrated a need for high-level commitment, which the Australian Food and Grocery Council have already agreed to. Action plans for each of the manufacturers are required, as are product category specific targets, in order to create a level playing field.

### **Belgium**

Salt reduction is one of the nutritional objectives of the National Food and Health Plan in Belgium, a taskforce has been set up to progress the campaign. A new national communication campaign for salt awareness began in 2009. Salt intake will be monitored via food basket screenings and a 24hr urine study. A children's food consumption survey is in preparation for 2010.

The 4th edition of UHI symposium in Brussels, held in February 2009, had a focus on salt and health. The event was attended by 3-400 dieticians & GPs.

### **Bulgaria**

A message from the Bulgarian Society highlighting the extent of cardiovascular disease in Bulgaria, entitled '**WASH or CASH**' will be published in the WSAW evaluation, stating "WASH or CASH that is

the question." Meaning to 'wash' the excessive amount of salt circulating in our bodies or to 'cash', pay with an increasing mortality from strokes and myocardial infarctions.

### **Canada**

Recent editorial from Dr Ken Flegal and Dr Peter Magner in the Canadian Medical Association Journal drew attention to the magnitude of the potential health benefits of salt reduction, estimating that salt reduction could decrease hypertension prevalence from 3.5million to 2.2 million. The editorial urges Canadians to take action by reading labels and demanding low salt food.

The world's leading scientific and medial specialists are meeting to discuss cardiovascular health at the International Society of Hypertension in Vancouver, 2010. Discussion is underway with the University of Calgary, WASH and the World Hypertension League to hold a salt symposium at the event.

### **Chile**

Dr Vanessa Garcia-Larsen, our first Chilean WASH member, has informed us that hypertension affects 33.7% of Chilean adults. Whilst there is no accurate data on salt intake at a national level, estimates suggest average consumption is around 10g/day. The Chilean Ministry of Health launched limited salt reduction guidelines in 2005 in the *Educative Guidelines for a Healthy Life*. The Ministry of Health's Advisory Committee on Diet & Nutrition is developing strategic liaisons with the food industry to create healthier food options.

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## **Cuba**

New WASH member Prof. Emilio F. González Rodríguez manages a group of specialists with the goal of researching hypertension in the city of Santa Clara, Cuba. The team has worked alongside government to develop a campaign about the influence of salt in hypertension. The campaign is being targeted at children, with the objective of teaching them whilst they are young using educational cartoons.

WASH is supporting the **HTA 2010 symposium**. The 2008 symposium successfully encouraged exchange and debate among its participants, and included guest speaker Dr Arun Chockalingam presenting a conference titled Epidemiology of Salt and Hypertension. Further details can be found at: <http://cencomed.sld.cu/hta2008/>

## **Denmark**

The Danish Health Authorities have recommended reducing dietary salt intake since the early 1990s. The current mean intake is 9-11g/day for men and 7-8g/day for women, predominantly from processed foods. Salt reduction in Denmark is purely voluntary, however all state workplaces are required by law to formulate a food policy, and there are regulations for nutrition claims in line with the EU regulations.

## **Finland**

Finland started a successful salt reduction campaign in 1970, in North Karelia. This campaign is still continuing nationally, both in informing the public

and working with the food industry. Finland is investigating further reduction options, such as providing 'warning' or 'better choice' labels on high salt foods; information campaigns; guidelines for food service providers and continued reformulation. It is estimated that industry has reformulated some product groups, such as bread, meat products, cheeses and ready meals to reduce their salt content by about 20-25%.

## **France**

At the end of 2009, France's consumer association *60 millions de consommateurs* released the results of a large survey, based on 257 products, showing that salt content and salt labelling have not changed between 2003 and 2008. WASH member Dr Pierre Meneton is still working towards changing attitudes to salt reduction in France.

## **Italy**

The Italian Nutrition Society, founded in 1963 by a group of physiology and nutrition experts, has been active in putting salt reduction on the agenda of Italian health. The group has been active in progressing the **Working Group for Reduction of Salt Intake in Italy** (GIRCSI), publishing the Italian Recommended Daily Allowances for energy and nutrients.

## **Ireland**

Ireland has been driving down salt levels using the UK's Food Standard Agency's salt reduction model, and has made significant reductions. Seventy-two companies have agreed to self-report, with several

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manufacturers reporting their products to be in line with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland's salt targets. Further reductions can be made via a coordinate approach and increased investment across Europe.

### ***Latvia***

The Republic of Latvia has started salt reduction discussions with representatives of the national food industry, with some support from the Ministry of Health. The priority is to survey the salt status of Latvia, as there is currently no data regarding average salt intakes.

### ***Luxembourg***

Luxembourg is incorporating reduced salt messages into their cardiovascular prevention awareness campaign. This is part of a national program for healthy nutrition and physical activity, which has been running since 2006. The Ministry of Health is progressing with encouraging reformulation of foods, firstly looking at reducing the salt in bread products.

### ***Malta***

The salt initiative framework in Malta is being coordinated by WASH member Malia Petra. The plans are in early stages of development as this is the first time Malta has looked at tackling salt reduction.

### ***Norway***

As members of the European Salt Action Network, the Government launched a Norwegian action plan

on nutrition 2007-2011. One of several goals is to reduce salt intake within the framework for national salt initiatives.

### ***Pakistan***

WASH member Dr Kazmi of Pakistan held two events regarding salt reduction in November 2008. During a talk on "Diabetes Day", Dr Kazmi spoke about two white killers: sugar and salt. At the 20th National Cardiology Conference in Faisalabad (Pakistan), the presentation was on "Obesity, hypertension and the role of salt".

### ***Slovakia***

Slovakia is currently updating the Nutrition Improvement Programme to include the target of 5g salt/day. Slovakia will be looking at where reduction in salt can be made, starting with bread and meat products.

### ***South America***

The WHO Collaborating Centre on Chronic Disease Policy is working with the Pan American Health Organisation in the Americas to take action towards salt reduction. Using case studies from WASH member countries, the International Programmes team are working on a customised solution for South America.

### ***Switzerland***

Salt reduction is now one of the key topics of the Federal Office of Public Health, as part of the National Programme on Diet & Physical Activity.

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First on the agenda is salt reduction in communal catering and in processed foods.

On behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health, researchers at Bern University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland are conducting a study to identify and analyze critical points of salt entry into communal catering. With the data they obtain, Bern University wishes to propose a catalogue of measures, aiming at reducing salt intake in Swiss communal catering.

### **UK**

Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) published research for Salt Awareness Week showing that many popular meals eaten in UK high-street restaurants can contain large amounts of salt, in some cases more than twice the daily maximum daily limit for an adult in a single meal.

The average person in the UK eats out of the home one in every six meals a week, therefore salt reductions in restaurants and in catering is likely to impact on daily salt intakes. CASH is working alongside the UK's Food Standard's Agency, who is pushing for catering businesses to help consumers make healthier choices when eating out.

Click here for more information:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/healthycatering/>

CASH are awaiting news on the revised targets for salt reduction, in order to meet the 6g target in 2010, due to be released early in 2009. WASH will update you as soon as possible.

### **USA**

The Institute of Medicine has formed a committee, which is undertaking a project to review and make recommendations that could be employed to reduce dietary sodium intake to levels recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The group will look at actions by food manufacturers, at a governmental level and by public health professionals. The report is expected to be published in early 2010.

New data published by CSPI has shown that the average sodium content of 528 packaged and restaurant foods has essentially remained the same between 2005 and 2008, even though food industry has acknowledged that sodium levels are too high. WASH members signed a petition to the Food and Drug Administration to reduce the status of salt from 'Generally Recognised as Safe' to an additive. The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) issued a statement stating that nothing has been done since the hearing. However in the absence of a national initiative, New York City is preparing to add permissible sodium levels to menus.

### **Vietnam**

Whilst there are no known 24 hr urinary sodium measurements in Vietnam, it is known that salt intake in Vietnam is very high, and the major cause of death is stroke. Professor Robert Beaglehole and Associate Professor Le Bach Mai are currently reviewing an NCD programme in Vietnam, where there is some interest in salt reduction, despite the limited data available.

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## ***WHO Salt Action Network***

### ***EU Framework for National Salt Initiatives***

The European Commission developed an EU Framework for National Salt Initiatives. The goal of this initiative is to contribute towards reduced salt intake at population level in order to achieve the national or WHO recommendations for no more than 5g/day. The initiative will work towards a reduction in salt of 16% over 4 years (4% per year) against the 2008 levels.

The framework will concentrate on 4 elements:

- 1. Benchmarking/categories**
- 2. Public Awareness**
- 3. Reformulation**
- 4. Monitoring**

Twenty-six EU countries have offered their support to the initiative, which is being led by the UK's Food Standards Agency. The Salt Action Network (SAN) members and WASH met in the UK this February to discuss issues such as salt reduction in catering and methods of salt reduction in cheese and meat.

For complete details:

[http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/recent\\_press\\_releases.htm](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/recent_press_releases.htm)

### ***High Level Group Nutrition members***

Supporting SAN, the High Level Group set up by the European Commission is composed of national representatives, experts in the field of nutrition and physical activity. WASH has written to the HLG members offering our support and encouraging them to join the EU framework for National Salt

Initiatives. We have had positive and encouraging responses from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic and Switzerland so far.

WASH is leveraging the relationship between its scientific members and the policy makers of the EU and WHO, with the assistance of the Food Standards Agency. WASH encourages you to get in touch with your country's representative to offer your expertise and encouragement. Group members can be found on our website at the following address:

[www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/docs/EU/hlg\\_nutrition\\_members.doc](http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/docs/EU/hlg_nutrition_members.doc)

### ***EU food labelling rules***

The Council Working Group on the Food Information Proposal took place on the 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> February 2009, to discuss regulation of food information. The European food industry is already actively implementing a voluntary nutrition labelling system based on Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs).

The European Food Information Council (EUFIC) published the results of a European labelling survey in November. European consumers are generally aware of nutritional labelling systems and guideline daily amounts (GDA). The survey questioned around 17,300 consumers in France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the UK, each of which uses a different nutritional labelling system.



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