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Introduction

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. WASH encourages and supports experts in different countries in setting up their own local campaigns. To view a list of aims: www.worldactiononsalt.com

WASH NEWS

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

WASH membership has grown to 334 individuals from 80 countries. New members include representatives from: Angola, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cuba, Dem Rep Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guam, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, Nairobi, Netherlands, Nigeria, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, USA and Venezuela. To view an updated members list: www.worldactiononsalt.com/home/members.htm

RESEARCH NEWS

Salt intake falls in the UK

In July, the UK's Food Standard's Agency published the results of a 24-hour urinary sodium analysis, showing the UK's average daily salt consumption has fallen from 9.5g to 8.6g since 2000. The reduction in salt consumption reflects the great progress made by the food industry in reformulating products, as well as behavioural changes of consumers. Whilst the results are encouraging, Consensus Action on Salt and Health, the UK arm of WASH, is pushing the Food Standards Agency in its public consultation to set

more challenging targets for salt reduction in all manufactured foods, as well as food eaten outside the home.

Graham MacGregor, Chairman of World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) commented on the results; "This is the most important news that we have heard about health and eating for a long time. Since the start of the salt reduction policy, salt intake has fallen in adults in the UK by approximately 10%. This represents a massive 19,700 tonnes of salt per year that has been removed from the UK diet".

The Food Standards Agency has been instrumental in bringing about this reduction in salt intake. Further details of their salt reduction strategies can be found on their website at www.salt.gov.uk

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

AUSTRALIA:

AWASH launched a food industry & manufacturing strategy document for consultation. Proposals are included for salt reduction targets for different food categories.

A media release was issued regarding the high content of salt in sausages, which received great coverage in the media including The Australian, News.com and ABC news. This is an important news story in Australia as according to Dr Bruce Neal, research director at The George Institute

for International Health in Sydney, sausages are considered iconic in the Australian diet.

In addition, Coles, a large Australian supermarket chain, announced they were reducing added salt by 25 percent over five years, setting the standard for other food manufacturers.

An Australian National Diet and Physical Activity survey is due to begin in 2009, for which inclusion of a 24-hour urinary sodium measurement is under consideration. Further details available on the AWASH website: www.awash.org.au

BANGLADESH:

The National Heart Foundation of Bangladesh, supported by the government, has published booklets and educational materials, alongside a media campaign, to create awareness for prevention of cardiovascular diseases. The Chairman, Professor Khandaker is currently organising a seminar to discuss how to reduce salt intake in Bangladesh.

CAMEROON:

The Cameroon Heart Foundation is holding their third Cameroon Heart Awareness Week. With the involvement of the Cameroon government, the CHF will be highlighting the risks of stroke and heart disease in poorly served areas, as salt remains the major risk factor for hypertension in Africa. Two hundred and fifty physicians are

expected to attend, reaching over 100,000 consumers through public conferences.

CANADA:

In early September WASH held a meeting with Dr Norm Campbell and his new colleague Jocelyne Bellerive of the University of Calgary in our London offices to share the work of WASH and to discuss future strategy for salt reduction work in Canada. WASH was informed of the hypertension education programme themed around sodium, which is communicated through primary care centres.

The Federally funded Canadian Stroke network has launched a new website to promote salt reduction www.sodium101.ca.

As well as providing useful information in both English and Canadian French, the website offers fridge magnets and shopping guides, which have been very successful with more than 10,000 requests from consumers. The website launch was supported with an awareness media campaign.

Sodium 101 website:



CHINA:

New guidelines for nutrition labelling on packaged foods for industry self-regulation have been introduced in China. These voluntary guidelines will standardise presentation of information on products that already state nutrient levels.

The new guidelines will have to detail levels of sodium per 100g, per 100ml or per serving, as well as labelling nutrient content as a percentage of the nutrient reference value. This is a major step for China which has WASH's support.

FINLAND:

Following research into salt consumption in Finland, the National Public Health Institute concluded that salt reduction would require long-lasting systematic work, including national legislation for lowering the salt content and compulsory nutrition labelling.

Following this advice, all heavily salted products will have to be labelled, including: cheese, meat and fish products, bread, soup, sauces and pre-prepared foods.

GUAM:

A new WASH member is the Western Pacific Island of Guam. Guam is known for its imaginative culinary arts, mixing many cultures such as Chamorro, Japanese, Korean and Thai with European and American fast food. Excessive salt consumption is a big problem in Guam, with the combination of Asian and Western diets. Our

WASH member, Dr Ramel Carlos is keen to disseminate information about salt reduction.

IRAN:

World Hypertension Day May 2008 was supported in Isfahan, Iran with the help of Dr Rezvan Ansari. The activity included an active week of education and interventions for the benefit of professionals, high blood-pressure patients and the general population. This provided a great opportunity to increase awareness and knowledge about hypertension and how to control it. Iran held education programs for one week in May, focusing on two messages: 1) Measure your blood pressure at home 2) Decreasing salt = decreases in high blood pressure. Isfahan is one of the biggest cities in Iran with a 5-6million population. Prevalence of hypertension in Isfahan is above 18%.

Photos from Iran's World Hypertension Day:



ITALY:

A campaign for cardiovascular disease prevention and health promotion has been undertaken in the autonomous region of Sardinia by Professor

Sergio Muntoni. An illustrated booklet, including recommendations for reducing salt intake was delivered to every household in Sardinia, posted with the electricity bill. Results showed that over 20% of rural and over 29% of urban people reduced their salt intake. Sardinia has also seen a corresponding fall in systolic blood pressure from 129 to 125 mmHg in three years ($p=0.5$) and diastolic from 83 to 80 mmHg ($p=0.004$). Sardinia continues in its efforts to reach the EU salt reduction target of 16% in 4 years.

JAPAN:

Following an interview with WASH Chairman Professor MacGregor, an article was published in August 2008 in Japan's leading newspaper 'The Asahi Shimbun' raising awareness of the dangers of salt. The article referred to the recent successes of the UK's salt reduction strategy.

In Japan, salt intake of population has increased from 10.7g to 11g per a day in the latest data for the first time in ten years. Experts warn that the Japanese are becoming the most 'salt-friendly' people in the world and point out it is imperative to involve the food industry to reduce salt intake.

NEPAL:

Nepal has become very active in raising awareness to consumers and policy makers through a series of research seminars, led by the President of the Nepal hypertension Society, Dr. Pandey.

NETHERLANDS:

In March 2008, NVVL (Network for Food Experts) and FNLI (Federation of the Dutch Food and Grocery Industry) jointly organised a symposium about sodium reduction in food products. FNLI has established the task force 'Salt in Foods' to stimulate the international food industry to reduce the use of salt in its products.

The task force aims at reducing salt levels across the sector. It will aim to ensure that consumers do not associate 'less salty' with 'less tasty'. The first phase, with an intended salt use reduction of 10–15%, will end late in 2009 or early in 2010. Each sector in the food industry monitors its own products, the FNLI will collect data and produce an overview annually. The repeated RIVM measurement of sodium levels in 24-hour urine samples will assess whether the approach has been successful.

SERBIA:

In the Republic of Serbia, cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death and disability. The latest national health survey indicated that the prevalence of hypertension among adults was 46.5% nationally, and in the capital of Novi Sad, 69.8%.

The Institute of Public Health of Vojvodina, School of Medicine University of Novi Sad undertook a research programme to measure the salt content of meals provided in kindergartens, students' canteens and public restaurants from

2005-07. The results showed a worrying upwards trend in the salt content of these meals over time. A combination of campaigning and media support has resulted in certain food suppliers agreeing to reduce the salt content of certain food items.

TURKEY:

Turkey has been active in raising awareness of salt and high blood pressure through a series of activities carried out by the Turkish Society of Hypertension and Renal Diseases.

World Hypertension Day was supported with a nationwide blood pressure measurement campaign, supported by the Ministry of Health. The campaign saw the 'hypertension truck' visit 9 major cities within Turkey, with a national and regional media campaign throughout the event involving a website, newspaper and television broadcasts. Blood pressure was measured in 31,837 people.

UNITED STATES:

WASH members have submitted comments in response to the Food and Drink Association hearing regarding salt's classification as 'Generally Recognised as Safe' (GRAS). WASH has further detailed the success of the UK salt reduction initiatives for the consideration of the FDA. For the full submission, www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocumentDetail&o=09000064806b48c8

WHO/EU INITIATIVES

WHO and EU activity

The EU and WHO are currently undertaking a number of initiatives to encourage a world-wide reduction in salt intake, both through manufacturing and consumer response. WASH is leveraging the relationship between its scientific members and the policy makers of the EU and WHO, with the assistance of the Food Standard's Agency.

WHO Salt Action Network

EU Framework for National Salt Initiatives

In the WHO 2007 White Paper on a Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Physical Activity and Health, the European Commission proposed to set up a High Level Group focused on nutrition and physical activity related health issues. The High Level Group is composed of national representatives, experts in the field of nutrition and physical activity.

Following two salt expert meetings and discussions with the High Level Group, 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. In a first stage, activities would be concentrated on 12

food categories, of which Member States have to choose at least 5 for their national plans. These 12 food categories are: bread; meat products; cheeses; ready meals; soups; breakfast cereals; fish products; crisps & savoury snacks; catering meals; restaurant meals; sauces, condiments and spices and potato products.

Countries that have already indicated they want to cooperate in this initiative are: **Italy; The Netherlands; Belgium; Bulgaria; Ireland; Germany; Spain; Luxembourg; Austria; France; UK; Finland; Sweden; Hungary; Slovenia; Norway; Denmark; Cyprus and Greece**

One of the major aspects of this initiative is the development of public awareness activities around the need to reduce salt level intakes. Whereas the public awareness activities would be led at national level by national governments, the involvement of other stakeholders, including health and consumer organisations, is likely to occur. The framework states that initiatives to raise public awareness should be implemented by 2009. For complete details: http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/recent_press_releases.htm

High Level Group Nutrition members

WASH encourages you to get in touch with your country's representative to offer your expertise and encouragement. Alternatively, if your country is not amongst those listed above, WASH

urges you to ask your representative to ask why not. We shall be undertaking a programme to contact the members ourselves. The High level Group members can be found on our website at the following address:

www.worldactiononsalt.com/media/docs/EU/hlg_nutrition_members.doc

EU food labelling rules

WASH urges all food manufacturers to adopt one method of labelling to maximize benefit for consumers, as salt per portion with agreed standardized portion sizes rather than salt per 100g. The CIAA, which represents European food manufacturers, is calling for simple and consistent labeling for all manufacturers.

Discussions in Brussels between food industry and consumer groups demonstrated that the proposed food information regulations, published at the beginning of the year require further work before a consensus will be reached. WASH would welcome your suggestions and recommendations in this area.

WORLD SALT AWARENESS WEEK 2009

Following the success of the first World Salt Awareness Week in January 2008, focusing on the effects of salt on children, World Salt Awareness Week 2009 has been confirmed for **Monday 2nd – Sunday 8th February 2009**.

We would like to invite all WASH members to participate in 2009; the proposed topic is **'salt and eating out'**.

The 2008 Week saw participation from 21 member countries, including: Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Finland, Georgia, India, Israel, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, UK and the US.

Activities ranged from involvement with hypertension experts, representatives from the health and education ministries, consumers, the media and the food industry. World Salt Awareness Week received wide-ranging local, national and international media coverage.

WASH will be contacting all members to request their support in due course. However if you would like to offer your support for World Salt Awareness Week 2009 already, please email kjenner@sgul.ac.uk,

In addition, WASH Chairman professor Graham MacGregor, a newly appointed board member of the World Hypertension League, will be supporting the theme of **'Salt and blood pressure'** for World Hypertension Day in **May 2009**. Further details will follow in due course.

For further information contact:

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