

The Need for Salt Reduction



SALT AND HEALTH

We need some salt (sodium chloride) in our diet to help regulate fluid in the body, but it is very unusual not to get enough. We are recommended to eat less than 6g of salt a day, which is about a teaspoon. Currently, we are consuming 8.4g a day, a third more than the maximum recommendation.

Evidence shows that regularly eating too much salt puts us at increased risk of developing high blood pressure. High blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is defined as a blood pressure which consistently exceeds 140/90 mmHg and puts too much pressure on blood vessels. This extra pressure can cause strain and lead to damage.

Consequently, high blood pressure is the main cause of strokes and a major cause of heart disease which are the most common causes of death and illness in the world. High blood pressure affects more than 1 in 4 people in the UK, costing the NHS over £2.1 billion every year.

REDUCING SALT

Many people do not realise they are eating too much salt because about 75% of the salt in our diet comes from processed foods. The UK's salt reduction programme involved setting incremental targets to guide the food industry in lowering salt in their products. This was incredibly successful between 2003 and 2011, lowering population salt intake and reducing population blood pressure. This model has been copied worldwide.

FUTURE OF SALT REDUCTION

While PHE have released new salt reduction targets, to be met by 2024, PHE are now set to be replaced and it is unclear who will enforce the programme.

Salt intake has not fallen since 2011 and meanwhile thousands of preventable deaths from stroke and heart disease occur each year.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Appoint or establish an independent body to enforce salt reduction**
- **Ensure regular and transparent monitoring of food industry progress**
- **Produce clear guidance for industry on how to reduce salt**
- **Implement a public awareness campaign on salt and health**

UK SALT REDUCTION TIMELINE

- 1994** COMA recommended a reduction in salt intake to <6 g/day to reduce cardiovascular disease
- 1996** Department of Health rejected COMA's recommendations on salt. Action on Salt was established
- 2000** FSA was set up, an independent body with responsibility for nutrition
- 2001** After call from Action on Salt and Blood Pressure UK, CMO endorsed COMA's recommendations on salt. FSA took on salt reduction as one of its first nutritional policies. SACN asked to review all evidence on salt
- 2003** SACN's report on salt and health was published. Action on Salt and FSA developed a salt reduction strategy
- 2005** FSA, with input from Action on Salt, developed salt targets for 85 categories of food
- 2006** FSA published the salt targets for industry to achieve by 2010
- 2008** FSA revised the targets to be achieved by 2012
- 2009** FSA published 2012 salt targets
- 2010** Andrew Lansley appointed Secretary of State. Nutrition policy transferred from the FSA to the Department of Health in England and Wales. Salt targets for 2014 should have been set
- 2011** Public Health Responsibility Deal launched. Lansley wanted to scrap the salt targets for 2012
- 2012** After strong lobbying from Action on Salt, 2012 salt targets were accepted but the Department of Health refused to set new salt targets. Lansley left the department
- 2013** Public Health Minister Anna Soubry agreed to set new salt targets
- 2014** Department of Health published 2017 salt targets
- 2015** Public Health Responsibility Deal dissolved following the 2015 General Election. It is unclear who has oversight of salt reduction
- 2017** PHE republish the 2017 salt targets as part of their Sugar Reduction and Wider Reformulation programme
- 2018** PHE release an analysis of the 2017 salt targets finding mixed progress. CMO report mentions salt reduction as a priority
- 2019** Salt reduction stated as a priority in *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s* with new salt targets promised in 2020
- 2020** Draft salt targets released in February, with final targets released in September. Secretary of State Matt Hancock announces that PHE will be disbanded