

Reducing Salt Consumption

Many Australians consume too much salt, which increases the risk of stomach cancer, kidney disease, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease including heart attack and stroke.

Reducing excess dietary sodium (salt) is a World Health Organization (WHO) public health goal to combat rising rates of chronic disease. Population health strategies targeting reductions in salt consumption are very cost effective.

High salt consumption is the second leading dietary risk factor contributing to the global burden of disease. High salt intake is estimated to cause 1.7–3.1 million cardiovascular deaths and result in 3% of years lived with disability (DALYs) globally each year.

Processed foods are a major source of salt and contribute 75–80% of dietary salt intake in most Western diets.

Australians consume approximately 9 grams of salt per day, which greatly exceeds the Australian suggested dietary target of <4 grams. Over one-third of adult Australians have high blood pressure, with estimates that 11% of ischaemic heart disease and 15% of stroke fatalities result from high salt intake.

Decreasing dietary salt consumption reduces blood pressure and deaths from cardiovascular disease.

Effective implementation of population-wide sodium health strategies internationally have resulted in reduced population dietary salt intake. These strategies have included government and industry collaborations to reduce salt through voluntary or mandatory targets in processed foods, clear labelling of salt content on packaged foods, consumer awareness campaigns and taxation on high salt foods. Strategies implemented in the United Kingdom, for example, have achieved a 15% reduction in the average sodium intake over the past decade, which is estimated to save 9,000 lives annually.

AHHA POSITION:

- ★ Australia should implement a national target for dietary salt intake that is systematically monitored and reported to evaluate progress. This target should reflect Australia's commitment to the WHO global 2025 target of a 30% reduction in mean population intake of sodium from 2010 levels.
- ★ To achieve this targeted reduction, a coordinated multi-faceted, population health strategy is necessary. This should include measures to reduce salt in pre-packaged foods, improve labelling of processed foods, reduce population salt consumption and increase public awareness of the risk, for example:
 - engagement with food manufacturers and retailers to implement salt reduction targets for processed foods, aligned with the national dietary salt target and WHO global 2025 targets, with mandatory implementation if voluntary strategies fail
 - mandatory front-of-package food and beverage labelling, providing consumers with necessary information to select products with less salt
 - public awareness campaigns about the health risks associated with consuming too much salt.

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