

Reducing Salt Consumption

Excessive sodium intake has been linked to high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, kidney problems and kidney stones, oedema, stroke, stomach cancer, and osteoporosis. The primary source of sodium in Australian diets is in the form of salt.

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 proven to be cost effective.

High sodium intake is one of the leading dietary risk factors globally with evidence from 2017 estimating that 3 million deaths and 70 million DALYs were associated with high sodium intake. Processed foods are a major source of salt and contribute 75–80% of dietary salt intake in most Western diets.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 2.5 million deaths each year could be prevented globally if salt consumption is reduced to recommended levels (<5g per day in adults).

The Australian dietary guidelines (Guideline 3) recommend limiting intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol. However, Australians currently consume nearly double the recommended dietary salt intake target of <5 grams (1 teaspoon). Reducing salt intake in Australia to recommend levels could save 3,400 lives a year.

It has been estimated that a population wide reduction of 1000mg sodium (3g salt) would lead to a 50% reduction in people seeking treatment for hypertension, 22% drop in mortality from stroke and 16% drop in health impacts associated with coronary health disease.

Effective implementation of population-wide sodium health strategies internationally has 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. For example, strategies

implemented in the United Kingdom, beginning in 2003-04 achieved a 15% reduction in the daily sodium intake over seven years, which is estimated to have saved 9,000 lives annually.

The Draft National Preventative Health Strategy released in March 2021 has an identified target to reduce the average population sodium intake by 30% by 2030.

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.
 - Engagement with food manufacturers and retailers to implement progressive, time-bound 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.
 - Regular population level monitoring of salt intake through administration of the Australian Health Survey (including 24- hour urinary sodium excretion studies in the biomedical component of the Survey) or an equivalent data collection mechanism that measures food and nutritional intake.