

Modest reductions in dietary salt would reap great benefits

US researchers say even a small reduction in the amount of salt in the daily diet would have a huge public-health impact.

Cutting just 1 g of salt a day would prevent a quarter of a million new heart-disease cases and 200 000 deaths from any cause over a decade [1].

Everyone would benefit, but certain groups gain more." These include African Americans, women, and those under 65.

80% of the salt in the US—and other Western nations' diets—comes from processed and prepared foods.

A 3-g daily reduction in salt would give same benefits as eliminating smoking

Bibbins-Domingo et al estimated the impact of an immediate reduction of daily salt intake by 0 to 6 g on the incidence of cardiovascular disease and deaths between 2010 and 2019. In that period, the model suggests that more than 800 000 life-years could be saved for each gram of salt lowered.

A 3-g daily reduction in the amount of salt consumed would provide morbidity and mortality benefits on the same order of magnitude as if we could eliminate smoking in the population, and that's a really important point to make. Such a reduction would result in 6% fewer cases of new heart disease, 8% fewer MIs, and 3% fewer deaths.

Even larger health benefits are projected for African Americans, she says, who are more likely to have high blood pressure and whose blood pressure may be more sensitive to salt: new heart-disease cases would be reduced by 10%, MIs by 13%, and deaths by 6%. Other groups who would gain include women, because of reductions in stroke—as high blood pressure is the major risk factor for stroke—and young people (under 65), who would benefit from a reduction in premature death, because often high blood pressure is the only risk factor in this group, she notes.

Consumer awareness is also important, so that individuals make more effort to reduce salt in their diets. Experiences in other countries suggest that the combination of government regulations, labeling requirements, voluntary efforts on the part of industry, and increasing consumer awareness of the dangers of consuming too much salt can, in concert, achieve worthwhile improvements.

Source

1. Bibbins-Domingo, Chertow G, Moran A et al. Population reductions in coronary heart disease associated with modest increases in salt intake: projections from the CHD policy model. AHA 49th Annual Conference on Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology and Prevention; March 10-14, 2009; Palm Harbor, FL. Abstract P51.