

Population-wide reduction in salt consumption recommended

January 13 2011

The American Heart Association today issued a call to action for the public, health professionals, the food industry and the government to intensify efforts to reduce the amount of sodium (salt) Americans consume daily.

In an advisory, published in *Circulation: Journal of the [American Heart Association](#)*, the association sets out the science behind the American Heart Association's recommendation for the general population, which is to consume no more than 1500 milligrams (mg) of [sodium](#) a day because of the harmful effects of sodium – elevated [blood pressure](#) and increased risk of stroke, heart attacks and kidney disease. Elevated blood pressure (hypertension) is a major public health problem – approximately 90 percent of all Americans will develop hypertension over their lifetime.

Sodium consumption is currently more than two times higher than the recommended upper limit of 1,500 mg daily, with 77 percent of that consumption coming from packaged, processed and restaurant foods. "Even a modest decline in intake – say 400 mg per day – would produce benefits that are substantial and warrant implementation," say the advisory authors. The 2005 United States Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommended a sodium intake limit of 2,300 mg per day, which many health experts say is too much for most Americans. Earlier this year, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee recommended to the secretaries of the United States Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that the goal should be modified to 1,500 mg per day for the general population. The

advisory committee consists of leading scientists who reviewed the most recent scientific studies and created a set of recommendations that are being reviewed by the secretaries.

Recently, the American Heart Association lowered their recommendation to no more than 1500 mg of sodium daily for the general public, after a report from the Centers for Disease Control found that a majority of the American population either have high blood pressure or are at high risk for developing it.

According to the advisory:

- As sodium intake rises, so does blood pressure and the risk of negative health outcomes.
- Independent of its effects on blood pressure, excess sodium intake adversely affects the heart, kidneys, and blood vessels.
- The potential public health benefits of sodium reduction are enormous and extend to all Americans.
- Scientific evidence on the adverse effects of excess sodium is strong and compelling
- The American Heart Association's 2020 impact goals – to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent – include a population-wide reduction of sodium consumption to less than 1,500 mg daily as one of the ways the association will measure the nation's cardiovascular health. Furthermore, a normal range blood pressure is another key factor the association will use to measure the nation's cardiovascular

health status.

- The American Heart Association is part of the National [Salt Reduction Initiative](#), which is working with the [food industry](#) to reduce sodium content in packaged and restaurant food.

Inherent to the negative health effects are rising healthcare costs, the authors add. They point to one recent study that suggests a national effort that reduces sodium intake by 1,200 mg per day should reduce the health burdens related to heart disease in addition to reducing costs by up to \$24 billion per year.

"Americans deserve the opportunity to choose how much sodium is in the food they eat. By supporting measures that will reduce sodium in the overall food supply, we are giving consumers freedom to select foods that could allow them to meet sodium recommendations and improve their ideal cardiovascular health," said Ralph Sacco, M.D., president of the American Heart Association.

The American Heart Association advocates for more robust sodium criteria within school nutrition standards, foods advertised and marketed to children and foods purchased by employers or government feeding programs, and for the Secretaries of HHS and USDA to adopt the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee recommendations.

The association also supports improved food labeling that helps consumers understand how much sodium is in their diet and consumer education in restaurants to help consumers choose lower-sodium options.

Provided by American Heart Association

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