

# Laws that encourage healthier lifestyles protect lives and save the NHS money

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The introduction of legislation that restricts unhealthy food, for example by reducing salt content and eliminating industrial trans fats, would prevent thousands of cases of heart disease in England and Wales and save the NHS millions of pounds, finds research published on [bmj.com](http://bmj.com) .

Heart disease and stroke cause over 150,000 deaths every year in the UK and yet over 80% of premature heart disease is avoidable, say the authors.

They add that established research has already indicated that individuals who consume too much salt and eat food which is high in industrial trans fats have a higher risk of developing heart disease.

Industrial trans fats are chemically altered [vegetable oils](#) found in thousands of [processed foods](#) from sweets and biscuits to ready meals. They are cheap, neutral in flavour and give products a long shelf life.

A research team, led by Dr Pelham Barton from the University of Birmingham's School of Health and Population Sciences, developed a modelling programme to show how specific public health interventions would prevent or delay deaths, improve quality of life and save NHS resources.

According to the projections put together by Barton and colleagues:

- a national programme reducing the [risk of heart disease](#) by 1% would prevent approximately 25,000 [heart disease](#) cases and save about £30m a year;
- reducing cholesterol or blood pressure levels by 5% (as already achieved in some other countries) would result in annual savings of approximately £80m or £100m;
- introducing legislation or other measures to reduce dietary salt intake by 3 grams a day or industrial trans fatty acid intake by approximately 0.7% would save about £40m or £230m a year.

Barton explains that the modelling projections were based on conservative assumptions and that the true benefits are likely to be higher than those reported in the study.

He also believes that the interventions would help reduce health inequalities as recent reports stated that consumption of [trans fats](#) is very high in some disadvantaged groups (over 6% of daily energy).

In conclusion the authors say they are reassured that their findings mirror results from similar work carried out in the USA and Australia. They argue that "population-wide prevention interventions seem to be both powerful and cost saving."

**More information:** [www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com)

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