

Less salt, less strokes, says new research

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(Medical Xpress) -- Speaking ahead of a United Nations High Level Meeting on non-communicable diseases, Professor Francesco Cappuccio from Warwick Medical School argues that lowering dietary salt intake has the potential to save millions of lives globally by substantially reducing levels of heart disease and strokes.

New research by Professor Cappuccio revealed this week in the [BMJ](#) shows that in the UK, a reduction of 3g [salt intake](#) per day would prevent up to 8,000 stroke deaths and up to 12,000 [coronary heart disease](#) deaths per year.

A similar reduction in the USA would result in up to 120,000 fewer cases of coronary heart disease, up to 66,000 strokes and up to 99,000 heart attacks annually. It would also save up to \$24 billion annually in [health care costs](#).

The [World Health Organisation](#) has set a global goal to reduce [dietary salt](#) intake to less than 5g (about one teaspoon) per person per by 2025, yet salt intake in many countries is currently much higher than this. The average daily intake in the UK is currently just under 9g. The question, though, is not whether to reduce salt intake, but how to do so effectively?

Professor Cappuccio and his co-authors say that changing personal behaviour and choice alone is not an effective or realistic option when the majority of salt is added to food before it is sold and the commercial addition of salt to food is becoming a global trend.

A four-pronged approach is therefore required, they say, and should form the base for a comprehensive policy:

- Communication - establishing and evaluating public awareness campaigns
- Reformulation - setting progressive salt targets for reformulating existing processed food and engaging with the food industry in setting standards for new foods
- Monitoring - surveying population salt intake, progress of reformulation, and effectiveness of communication
- Regulation - engagement with industry, including regulation, to create a level playing field so as not to disadvantage more enlightened and progressive companies

Professor Cappuccio said: “The huge responsibility of food manufacturers in contributing to the epidemic of cardiovascular disease must be acknowledged.

“Prevention implemented through food reformulation and effective voluntary, market intervention or mandatory action throughout the industry is what needs to happen with society, governments, academia and health organisations all needing to play a part. However, denial and procrastination will be costly in terms of both avoidable illness and expenses,” he warned.

More information: The full article, printed in the *BMJ* on 12 August can be viewed here: www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.d4995

Provided by University of Warwick

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