

Low-cost population-wide salt reduction strategies could save lives

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Reducing salt consumption at population levels is a cost-effective strategy to combat high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease in Africa according to new Griffith University-led research.

In a study published in the *British Medical Journal Open*, researchers

from Griffith's School of Medicine and the University of Oxford evaluated the [health impacts](#) and cost-effectiveness of three population-wide dietary salt reduction strategies (mass media campaigns, school-based education programs and a switch from regular cooking salt to low-sodium salt substitutes) to reduce salt intake in Cameroonians.

Lead author Dr. Leopold Aminde, a Griffith University Postdoctoral Research Fellow, said [low-income](#) and [middle-income countries](#) (LMIC) bore the brunt of the global non-communicable disease epidemic, with [cardiovascular disease](#) being the major contributor.

"About one in three adult Cameroonians have a [high blood pressure](#), and excessive [salt consumption](#) is a major underlying factor," Dr. Aminde said.

"Evidence from high-income countries has shown that reducing salt consumption at population levels is a cost-effective strategy to combat high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease, however, very few studies have assessed the impact of such strategies in Africa."

He said about three-quarters of the salt consumed in Cameroon and other LMICs was added during cooking or at the table.

"Therefore, strategies to reduce salt intake need to target the consumers. We found mass media campaigns, a national school education program and switching regular cooking salt to low-sodium salt could prevent between 10,000 to over 80,000 deaths from heart disease and stroke in Cameroon," Dr. Aminde said.

All three interventions were very cost-effective with an 85-100% probability of being cost-saving.

"This is very promising for LMICs like Cameroon with limited

resources," said Professor Lennert Veerman, senior author and Professor of Public Health at Griffith University School of Medicine.

"Such excellent returns on investment could be ploughed back to other health-promoting strategies, basic health care or other social causes.

"For high-income countries like Australia, salt reduction strategies need to focus on the [food industry](#) that puts excess salt in processed foods. This could include setting mandatory limits in salt content of processed foods, or fiscal policies such as taxing food products with salt contents above certain thresholds.

"We must play our part by keeping the saltshakers and soy sauce away from the dinner table and use other condiments for flavouring."

More information: Leopold Ndemnge Aminde et al. Cost-effectiveness analysis of population salt reduction interventions to prevent cardiovascular disease in Cameroon: mathematical modelling study, *BMJ Open* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-041346](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-041346)

Provided by Griffith University

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