

New research evaluates the UK's current salt reduction program

September 19 2023



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New research from Queen Mary University of London and published in the [*Journal of Hypertension*](#), shows the Government has failed to reduce population salt intakes and consequently improve public health in

England since 2014 —putting thousands of lives at risk.

Today, Action on Salt together with 33 leading experts and health charities are calling on [party leaders](#) to prioritize salt reduction through a mandatory and comprehensive program. Failure to act will have a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of the population, as well as on the economy.

This also coincides with a new consumer poll by Action on Salt which shows nearly 90% of the U.K. population would support the government in taking action to protect the public from avoidable health conditions like heart disease and strokes while nearly 80% think ministers should do more to reduce the salt we eat as a nation. Furthermore, 85% of the population would support the government in requiring [food companies](#) to reduce unnecessary salt in their products.

The study, titled "Salt Intake, Blood Pressure and Cardiovascular Disease Mortality in England, 2003–2018," aimed to investigate the impact of the U.K.'s pioneering voluntary salt reduction program since its inception. Using publicly available data to evaluate population salt intake, [blood pressure](#) (BP) and deaths from heart disease and stroke, the results showed that while average salt intake, BP and deaths in the adult population of England initially decreased as a result of the pre-2014 policies, the declines have since stopped:

- A decline in salt intake from 9.38g/day to 7.58g/day between 2003 and 2014, followed by an increase to 8.39g/day in 2018
- A decline in population BP from 125.3/74.5 mmHg to 122.6/73.3 mmHg between 2003 and 2014, following by a plateau 122.0/73.8 mmHg in 2018
- A fall in stroke and heart disease mortality rates from 12.2 and 43.4 deaths per 100,000 to 8.2 and 27.2 deaths per 100,000 between 2003 and 2014, followed by a plateau afterwards.

These findings confirm an already overwhelming body of evidence linking the importance of salt reduction to improved health, and that when done correctly, a salt reduction program can save thousands of premature deaths from strokes and heart disease. However, the lack of progress since 2014, coinciding with responsibility for the salt reduction program being handed over to the [food industry](#), indicates that the effectiveness of the program has been compromised. It was estimated that, if the previous successful program had continued, there would have been a further reduction of 1.45 g/day in salt intake from 2014 to 2018. This would have prevented more than 38,000 deaths from strokes and heart disease in just a 4-year period, of which 24,000 would have been premature.

This research also provides valuable evidence for policymakers and public health authorities that comprehensive and well-managed salt reduction programs, are pivotal in preventing strokes and heart disease events, two of the leading causes of death in the U.K.

Professor Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Queen Mary University of London, Chairman of Action on Salt and co-author of the analysis says, "This study reinforces the urgent need for a robust system where we generate worthwhile reductions in salt intake which make a positive and lasting impact. It is now up to the Government to set up a coherent strategy where the food industry is instructed what to do, rather than the food industry telling the Government what to do. We must get our salt reduction strategy back on track for the benefit of [public health](#), the U.K. workforce, our overburdened NHS and the economy."

Jing Song at Queen Mary University of London and first author of the *Journal of Hypertension* analysis says, "Reducing salt intake has been identified by the World Health Organization as one of the most cost-effective measures to improve population [health](#). As a nation, if we cut

one gram of salt from our average daily salt intake, this could save over 6,000 lives every year from strokes and [heart disease](#)—all of which are completely avoidable—and save the economy £1.5 billion annually."

Sonia Pombo, campaign lead at action on salt and co-author adds, "The once successful salt reduction program is a shell of its former self. Salt reduction is simple and easy to implement, and this research confirms it works. But the UK's downfall was trusting the food industry to deliver reductions in [salt](#) content without an incentive to do so or enforcement from the Government. Urgent resuscitation in the program is needed if we are to get back on track and save the most lives."

More information: Jing Song et al, Salt intake, blood pressure and cardiovascular disease mortality in England, 2003–2018, *Journal of Hypertension* (2023). [DOI: 10.1097/HJH.0000000000003521](https://doi.org/10.1097/HJH.0000000000003521)

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

Citation: New research evaluates the UK's current salt reduction program (2023, September 19) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-uk-current-salt-reduction.html>

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