

DROP THE SALT!

Campaign Bulletin

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Quarterly Update – June 2008

The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) is a growing network of individuals and organisations concerned with salt and its detrimental effects on health. The primary goal is to reduce the average amount of salt consumed by Australians to 6g per day within the next five years.

This campaign bulletin will be published quarterly to bring stakeholders and supporters up-to-date with relevant issues.

AWASH Drop the Salt! Initiatives

New Research Assistant



Elizabeth Dunford joined The George Institute as the new Research Assistant for the 'Drop the Salt!' campaign at the beginning of May. Elizabeth will be primarily responsible for the development and analysis of AWASH's new database to monitor salt levels in processed foods. Email edunford@george.org.au.

Progress since salt and children debate

Many of you will remember the exciting debate on salt and children chaired by Dr Norman Swan during Salt Awareness Week in January. Following that meeting AWASH agreed to:

- Consult on a food industry strategy
- Meet with State and Federal Government Departments
- Promote the need for a high profile labeling forum.

Food industry strategy

Members of the AWASH advisory group and the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) have been consulted on a draft strategy to work with the food and catering industries to reduce salt in foods by an average of 25% over five years. The document will be launched for further consultation in July and meetings will be held with key industry

organisations to discuss implementation of the strategy during July and August 2008. Several companies (notably Coles and Smiths Snackfood Company) have committed to reducing salt in their products by 25% over the next five years in line with the AWASH strategy.

Sodium database for Australian foods

To monitor implementation of the food industry strategy, AWASH has established a sodium database. This will enable tracking of the changes in the salt content of the food supply over time, in general as well as in relation to specific food categories. Analysis of changes between 2007 and 2008 will be available early in 2009, with a view to comparing the data annually until 2012 thereafter.

Federal and State Government engagement

Bruce Neal and Jacqui Webster met with Senator Jan McLucas to discuss how salt might be addressed as part of existing commitments. Further discussions are planned for next month. AWASH also made a submission to Kevin Rudd's Australia 2020 Summit to highlight the cost effectiveness of salt reduction as part of the government's health strategy.

The George Institute, with funding from AWASH, NSW Health and West Sydney Area Health Services, has just commissioned Sydney Health Projects Group to write a review of the evidence to support the proposals for government intervention to address salt in Australia. The report will be available towards the end of July 2008

Jacqui Webster met with Dr Roscoe Taylor and his colleagues at the Department of Health and Human Services in Tasmania in March in the first of a series of regional AWASH meetings to put salt on the agenda at a state level. Details of further meetings will be posted on the AWASH website shortly.

Iodine fortification

AWASH has submitted a revised response to FSANZ on the new Proposal P1003 – Mandatory Iodine Fortification for Australia. See the AWASH website for further details.

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Food labeling

The latest consumer poll from the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) released in May confirmed that, whilst Australians may be aware that too much salt in their diets leads to health problems, most do not understand how to work out the salt content from the nutrition labels. The results of the consumer poll were announced by AWASH Senior Project Manager, Jacqui Webster, at a workshop at the Dietitians' Association of Australia National Conference on the Gold Coast in May. Over 80 conference delegates attended the workshop and backed the AWASH call for Federal government leadership to introduce clearer labelling highlighting the salt content of foods.

AWASH Chair, Dr Bruce Neal said, "There have been many suggestions on how our food labeling can be improved but it is time now to acquire the evidence of what will work best to ensure consumers can make the best choices about the salt content of food. Once we have evidence-based research revealing the most effective labeling system, the government should mandate its use on Australian packaged foods."

Said Claire Hewat, Executive Director of the Dietitians Association of Australia: 'The DAA supports initiatives that make it easier for Australians to choose healthy foods, and that includes clear nutrition labelling on food and drinks. But any new labelling initiative needs to be carefully looked at to make sure it doesn't further confuse Australians'.

The Parents Jury is running an Improved Labeling campaign to inform and empower Australian parents to learn about the types of information that appear on food packaging, to understand labeling regulations and to practice reading food labels at home with their families. For more information see <http://www.parentsjury.org.au/>.

KEY Early Detection Pilot Project

In 2008, Kidney Health Australia, with the support of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and BHP Billiton, launched the Kidney Evaluation for You (KEY) chronic kidney disease early detection pilot program. Drop the Salt! campaign leaflets about reducing salt have been distributed to participants. For further information, call 1800 682 531 or visit the Kidney Health Australia website www.kidney.org.au.

Conferences and Events

Iodine deficiency in Australia – a call for action, May 2008

On Monday the 26 May 2008, a Symposium was held under the auspices of the Australian Academy of Science, the International Life Sciences Institute, Australasia and the Nutrition Society of Australia to address the topic of iodine deficiency in Australia. Caryl Nowson, a member of the AWASH Secretariat, addressed the topic "Why is iodine an essential nutrient? How much do people need?"

Blood Pressure Awareness Month and International World Hypertension Day, 17th May 2008

May was Blood Pressure Awareness Month and May 17th International World Hypertension Day. To coincide with this The Lancet has published a study revealing that 54% of stroke and 47% of heart disease worldwide are attributed to high blood pressure, with about half of this occurring in people with normal blood pressure levels. Director of The George Institute for International Health, Stephen MacMahon, called for more action to be taken to address this problem. See <http://www.worldhypertensionleague.org/Pages/whd.aspx> for more information.

Dietitians Association of Australia Conference, May 2008 and the Population Health Congress, July 2008

AWASH Senior Project Manager, Jacqui Webster, facilitated a workshop on the development of salt reduction strategies at the Dietitians Association of Australia's Annual meeting on the Gold Coast at the end of May, and will be presenting research on salt and children at the Population Health Conference in Brisbane this July.

Baker's Conference

Caryl Nowson gave a presentation on AWASH and the importance of the bread industry taking steps to reduce salt in bread at this year's Association of Bakers' conference in Melbourne in April. Further details will be posted on the AWASH website shortly.



Latest Research on Salt and Health

It is widely known that a low salt diet can help reduce blood pressure. However, more and more research is showing that a low salt diet can have benefits that extend beyond cardiovascular health.

- **A low salt diet for depression?** - This recent study, from the May issue of the British Journal of Nutrition, found that people following a low salt, high potassium diet had a lower incidence of depression, tension and had improved overall mood.
- **High acute salt intake has adverse effects on blood pressure in normal people** - This study examined the effect of acute salt loading in people with normal blood pressure levels after they had been following a low salt diet. Even in young, healthy subjects, salt loading caused adverse cardiovascular effects.
- **High salt intake linked to increased risk of gastric cancer** - A recent article published in the May issue of Nutrition Reviews determined there is strong evidence for a link between a high salt intake and an increased risk of gastric cancer.
- **More research supporting the link between a high salt diet and osteoporosis** - An article in the April issue of the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research has found more evidence that a high dietary salt intake can increase the risk of osteoporosis, due to its negative effect on calcium balance in the body.
- **Researchers link high salt diet to ulcers** - Scientists from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) have discovered that diets high in salt may increase the virulence of the pathogen *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), which is the most common cause of ulcers in the stomach.

International Developments

- The European Commission has set up a high level political group on nutrition, the European Salt Action Network, who held their first meeting in March this year.
- CASH UK has conducted research showing that children's food still contains high levels of salt. Other research by CASH has found that vegetarian products (such as burgers and sausages) can be higher in salt than their meat-based equivalents. See www.actiononsalt.org.uk for more information.
- The FDA launched a public consultation in late 2007 on whether to remove salt's GRAS status following repeated petitions from interest groups highlighting the negative health effects of salt consumption. See <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/fr071023.html>.
- The FSA in the UK is currently reviewing progress made in achieving the salt reduction targets set out in 2006. Results are expected later this year. Further details on developments in the UK can be seen by accessing the CASH homepage; <http://www.food.gov.uk>.

Become an AWASH Supporter

Don't forget that the success of the Drop the Salt! campaign depends on widespread support from all stakeholders including consumers, industry, government and other interested groups. If you support AWASH's mission and goals, why not sign on to become a supporter? Becoming an AWASH supporter is free. For more information, or to sign up as a supporter, visit: http://www.awash.org.au/about_supporters.html.

Please feel free to send this newsletter on to friends or colleagues that you think would be interested in becoming a supporter of AWASH.

For further information, to comment on anything in this bulletin or suggest issues for future Drop the Salt! bulletins contact Elizabeth Dunford on 02 85072529 or email edunford@george.org.au.