

Media Release

Australians aren't acting smart when it comes to salt

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New research released at the Drop the Salt! Campaign launch this week suggests that although many Australians are 'salt smart', most aren't using what they know. While most Australians understood that the majority of salt comes from processed foods, a report from the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) has shown that few consumers regularly check food labels for salt content and even fewer act on what they find.

Well-known nutritionist, Catherine Saxelby, welcomed the launch of the new salt reduction campaign and gave some easy to remember tips to busy Australians. "Most people could considerably lower the amount of salt they eat by taking a few simple steps."

Catherine recommends six easy ways of reducing salt that will improve health without sacrificing flavour:

1. Check the **sodium** levels on the nutritional label and choose your low salt food using the following guidelines: 120mg sodium per 100g is a low salt food. Foods with more than 600mg sodium per 100g are very high and should be avoided if possible. Beware that salt content in most Australian food is labelled as milligrams of sodium which can be overlooked if you are looking for low "salt".
2. Cut out those well-known, highly-salted foods like olives, anchovies, potato crisps, pretzels, pizza and yeast spread.
3. Use less salt at the table. Develop your taste for natural food flavours. Taste your food before adding salt and try pepper or paprika to boost the flavour.

4. Use half the quantity of salt suggested in recipes
5. Be creative. Rather than salt, use fresh herbs, garlic, ginger, lime, vinegar, lemon juice, wine, homemade stock/gravy, onions or shallots.
6. Eat more fresh fruit and veges. Enjoy these as snacks, instead of biscuits and savoury foods.

Australians must recognise that salt is a major cause of high blood pressure and increases the risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. According to AWASH Chair, Assoc. Prof. Bruce Neal, most Australians need to change their diet to reduce these risks. "Not enough is being done to reduce salt in people's diets. In part this is because the magnitude of the problem caused by salt is not well understood. Nearly everyone would gain long term health benefits if they cut some of the salt from their diet", said Prof. Neal.

"Most Australians are eating well above the 6 grams per day recommended by the National Heart Foundation of Australia. If we could get all Australians down to the recommended level we could prevent about one fifth of all strokes and heart attacks in Australia each year", he noted.

The 'Drop the Salt!' campaign will work with industry to try and achieve a 25% reduction in the salt content of processed and catered foods over the next five years. The campaign also aims to encourage consumers to read food labels, understand what the information means and choose foods that have less salt.

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Notes to editors:

1. This press release has been issued by the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) Secretariat, which coordinates the day-to-day activities of AWASH and takes final responsibility for all outputs from AWASH. The Secretariat is informed by an Advisory Group which comprises a larger group of individuals with expertise in a range of different areas pertinent to the activities of AWASH.
2. AWASH is a growing network of individuals and organisations concerned with salt and its effects on health. The mission of AWASH is to improve the health of Australians by achieving a gradual population-wide reduction in dietary salt consumption that will reduce cardiovascular diseases and other salt-related health problems. Visit www.awash.org.au for more information and for a full list of our advisors and supporters.

3. AWASH will be working to Drop the Salt! by promoting the benefits of salt reduction and engaging the participation of all sectors of the Australian community - including industry, schools, consumers, scientists, healthcare workers, governments, regulatory bodies and professional organisations. Regular monitoring of progress towards the goal and careful scrutiny of the development of each strategy will be undertaken throughout the campaign.
4. In 2006, around 194 medical experts from 48 countries around the world joined together to launch WASH – World Action on Salt and Health – in a concerted effort to reduce dietary salt intake, in order to lower blood pressure globally. AWASH is building on the success of the UK campaign. Visit www.worldactiononsalt.com for more information on WASH.