

Salt Awareness Week
Parent testimonial – Shalani McCray

Mother of two, Shalani McCray says in order to make the best health choices for her children (14 & 17), she purchases low-salt options from the supermarket and makes most of their food from scratch. “I read the food labels and cook daily so I’m aware of how much salt is in their diet. It is hard to manage though!”

Shalani, 42, became aware of the dangers of salt due to her interest in health having trained in nursing, naturopathic health and early childhood, and being a mum. “My husband’s family suffered from high blood pressure, and both of his parents died from high blood pressure related diseases. So we’ve made simple lifestyle changes that ensures my husband has reduced blood pressure, including reducing salt in his diet.”

As a salt-aware parent, Shalani was shocked to find that children can also be affected by high blood pressure and increase their risk of heart disease and stroke later in life. “I’m very conscious of the amount of salt my children eat. But most parents don’t realize just how much salt is in children’s food and need to be made aware of the harmful effects on their child’s health, particularly long-term.”

How does she manage a low-salt diet? “I am a compulsive label reader, and buy fresh and unprocessed foods. I don’t buy muesli bars, savoury biscuits/snacks etc. The only cereal I buy regularly is weetbix. It’s amazing the amount of salt in some breakfast cereals. I do buy some tinned food and where possible make low salt choices. At first the children complained about the bland taste but they soon got used to it. More frequently now they complain that store bought food is too salty. I encourage other parents to read the labels, and to learn how much salt is too much.”

[The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommend a maximum upper limit of 3.5g salt per day for 4-8 year olds, and 5g for 9-13 year olds, and 5.7g for 14-17 year olds. However, adding up the salt content of a typical child’s meals and snacks for a day shows it would be very easy to consume over twice this amount.]

As well as urging parents to take responsibility for their children’s health, Shalani is calling on food manufacturers to reduce the amount of salt in food and provide clearer labeling. “This should also be backed by government support, so our already overburdened health system doesn’t reach breaking point due to diet and lifestyle-related chronic diseases increasing at such an alarming rate.”

Event Details:

Drop The Salt! Campaign Debate
9- 12noon (followed by lunch), 31 January 2008
The Dixon Room, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney
www.awash.org.au

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