



## **UN Summit – Non-communicable diseases – Target setting**

**The 432 members from 82 countries of World Action on Salt and Health recommend that:**

- An international salt reduction target is set of less than 5g per person per day by 2025.

The major cause of non-communicable disease (NCDs) is cardiovascular disease, i.e. strokes, heart attacks and heart failure, and the major causes of this are high blood pressure, smoking and raised cholesterol. Salt is the major factor that puts up blood pressure.

Worldwide current intakes of salt range between 5 and 15g (Webster et al, 2011); it is estimated that a reduction of 6g/day in salt intake would prevent approximately 2.5 million strokes and coronary heart disease deaths a year (He & Macgregor 2009).

The benefits of salt reduction on blood pressure are widely accepted and have been recognised on a global scale; identified as a priority intervention and listed as a 'best buy' in non communicable disease (NCD) prevention at the recent UN High Level meeting on NCDs (WEF, 2011, Beaglehole et al, 2011, Asaria et al, 2007). It is the simplest and most cost effective measure to reduce NCDs due to its high impact on health, high feasibility and low cost of implementation. It is directed towards the whole population and is considered at least if not more cost effective than tobacco control for both developed and developing countries [NICE and Asaria]. The World Health Organisation set a target of 5 gram a day in 1983, which was further endorsed in 2003 (WHO/FAO, 2003) and 2006 (WHO, 2006).

The UK is currently leading the world in salt reduction, which, having reduced intakes by 1g is predicted to be saving 6000 lives a year and many more lives will be saved as the



programme continues. The UK's approach of voluntary salt reduction targets, getting the food industry to slowly reduce the excessive amounts of salt they put into foods, has proved successful – salt intakes have dropped from 9.5g to 8.6 between 2001 and 2008 and will continue to fall with further reduction in salt in processed foods, and food eaten out of the home. This approach is now being adopted by many countries around the world.

Voluntary or mandatory reductions by the food industry would save billions of dollars from health care costs. In the United States, a national effort to decrease salt consumption by 3g/day is estimated to result in an estimated saving of \$10 billion to \$24 billion in health care costs (Bibbins-Domingo et al 2010).

It is imperative that an international target is set to promulgate efforts to reduce salt, without which no action is guaranteed and the food industry will not be held to account. We cannot allow the commercial interests of the global food and tobacco industry to take precedence over the lives and suffering of individuals.

The totality of the evidence is clear – we are eating vastly more salt than we need and it is causing an enormous burden of disease, we just need to get on and make salt reduction happen.

***World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) was established in 2005 and is a global group with the mission to improve the health of populations throughout the world by achieving a gradual reduction in salt intake. WASH has 432 members from 82 countries. Members are mainly experts in hypertension, however some have other roles as well - but all have an interest in reducing salt intake in their individual countries.***

## References

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