Reducing dietary salt intake.

A policy statement of the World Hypertension League, the International Society of Hypertension and undersigned National Hypertension Organizations.

Policy Goal:
Dietary salt intake to be consistent with the World Health Organization recommended target of less than 5g/day/adult with lower intake in children based on their lower caloric requirements. At a minimum, countries should reduce dietary salt intake by 30% by 2025 as recommended by the United Nations.

Audience:
Policy makers in government, non-governmental organizations, and the food industry.

Rationale:
• Increased blood pressure is the leading risk factor for death and disability.
• 3 in 10 adults have hypertension.
• Management of increased blood pressure consumes an estimated 10% of overall healthcare expenditures.
• As dietary salt intake increases blood pressure increases. Thirty percent of hypertension is estimated to be due to high dietary salt intake.
• In nearly all countries, current diets have >5gm salt/person/day starting from early childhood.
• In most countries, the largest amount of dietary salt comes from processed foods but in some settings adding salt to food at home in cooking or at the table is still the major source.
• Reducing salt consumption is a cost-effective population intervention to improve health with the WHO indicating it is a ‘best buy’.
• The United Nations has set a target of a 30% reduction in dietary salt by 2025.
• Major programs, policies and regulations to reduce salt consumption are justified because salt additives in food are common, people are not aware of how much salt they are eating, there are wide spread adverse health outcomes from high salt consumption and there are very substantial cost savings in preventing premature death and disability from reducing high dietary salt.
• Salt intake can be reduced without compromising micronutrient fortification efforts.

Recommendations for Policy and Action:
This policy statement is consistent with the World Health Organization approach to dietary salt reduction programs including product reformulation, ensuring health choices are affordable and available, increasing public knowledge and awareness and monitoring and evaluating the program.
The undersigned organizations call on national governments, the food industry and non government organizations to take immediate actions to reduce dietary salt towards the World Health Organization recommendation of less than 5 gm/day in adults and avoid high salt intake in children based on their proportionally lower caloric requirements.

**To national governments**
Implement an effective salt reduction programs that includes:

- Effective targets, with timelines, for lower salt levels in processed foods including restaurant foods.
- Encouraging the food industry to provide in all markets the lowest of a) best in class (salt content of a processed food that is similar to that which is lowest in the specific food category) and b) best in world (the lowest salt content of the specific food produced by the company elsewhere in the world).
- Public awareness programs that include children about the health risks of high dietary salt and how to reduce salt intake as part of a healthy diet.
- A monitoring and evaluation program for dietary salt intake, the major sources of dietary salt and the salt content of specific foods. Regularly and publically report progress towards the target for dietary salt intake and the salt content in specific foods.
- Easily understood mandatory labels on processed food and restaurant foods so consumers can easily identify high and low salt foods.
- Effective restrictions on marketing unhealthy foods and beverages to children including those high in salt.
- Coordination with salt iodization programs where salt is iodized.

**To non-governmental organizations**

- Endorse this policy statement
- Engage policy and decision makers to support programs for reduction of high salt intake.
- Participate in or lead health coalitions for advocacy and encourage your members to advocate for salt reduction programs.
- Through regular education programs, presentations at meetings, publications and other communications educate your members on the health risks of high dietary salt and how to reduce high salt intake.
- Utilize media releases and education programs on reduction of high dietary salt to reach the public.

**To the food industry**

- Ensure the low salt products that are best in class and best in world are universally available across global markets.
- Market salt substitutes at affordable prices.
• Reformulate to lower the high salt content of all current food products that have added salt.
• Ensure all new food products are low in salt.
• Use clear and easy-to-understand food labels to indicate low and high salt foods to consumers.
• Promote the health benefits of avoiding high salt diets to all consumers.

Acknowledgement
This policy statement is based in part on that of the Pan American Health Organization Salt Expert Group

Attachment
http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sodium_intake_print_version.pdf

Supporting organizations

WHL Members:
American Society of Hypertension
European Heart Network
Hypertension Canada
Italian Society and League of Hypertension
Japanese Association of Hypertension
Korean Society of Hypertension
National Heart Foundation of Australia
National Hypertension Association
Taiwan Society of Cardiology
Southern African Hypertension Society

WHL Partners:
International Council of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation
International Diabetes Federation
World Action on Salt & Health
World Stroke Federation
The National Heart Foundation of Australia supports the principles of the World Hypertension League Sodium Policy Statement. The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council’s Nutrient Reference Values (2006) recommends no more than 6g/day of dietary salt consumption for Australian adults.