



## ***New research reveals salt kills 1.6 million people a year worldwide***

### **Australian Health Experts Decry Separate Study Questioning Salt Reduction**

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It is estimated that 1.65 million deaths each year are a direct consequence of eating too much salt, which is known to increase blood pressure – a risk factor for stroke and heart attack, according to new research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM).

The George Institute for Global Health, the National Heart Foundation of Australia and VicHealth have responded to the study saying it shows the scale of the health hazards of consuming too much salt.

The new findings were reported by the Global Burden of Disease group and included data on salt intake (modelled on the risk in consuming more than 2 grams of sodium, or 5 grams salt) from 66 countries and evidence from more than 100 trials of salt reduction.

“The harmful effects of salt on blood pressure and the very close link between blood pressure and cardiovascular disease are very well established,” said Professor Neal from The George Institute at the University of Sydney in Australia.

“Hopefully this will be a wake-up call for governments all around the world. Huge amounts of salt are being added to the food supply for purely commercial purposes, and it is taking a terrible toll on human life.”

Member States of The United Nations have agreed to reduce average population salt intake by 30% by 2025. The Food Policy Division at the George Institute for Global Health was last year designated as a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Population Salt Reduction with a remit to support countries to achieve these new targets. WHO Centre Director Jacqui Webster says, “Many countries are initiating programs to reduce salt including introducing regulatory measures to get the food industry to reduce salt in foods. But more urgent action is needed in view of the extent of the problem.”

Leading Australian health bodies, The Heart Foundation and VicHealth, have echoed the support for further evidence that demonstrates the scale of the health hazards presented by high consumption of salt.

Jerril Rechter, VicHealth CEO, said a five-year study into over 120 illness prevention measures named salt reduction as one of the most effective measures to save lives in years to come.



“Salt is linked to strokes, heart disease, high blood pressure, gastric ulcers, stomach cancer and more than 20 other health problems. On average, we eat more than nine times the amount we need,” Ms Rechter said. “With millions worldwide dying every year from excessive salt, mostly hidden in everyday grocery foods, governments simply cannot afford not to take action.”

Also published in the NEJM were two reports from the PURE study. One analysis highlighted the role of insufficient potassium (alongside excess salt) as a cause of high blood pressure. The other questioned the safety of reducing salt intake to the lower level recommended by the World Health Organization.

“The large numbers and many countries included in the PURE study are impressive, and the data on potassium affirms what we know,” said Professor Neal.

“But the analysis suggesting increased risks with lower level of salt consumption is almost certainly wrong. The PURE study simply wasn’t designed to answer that type of questions and it’s a very poor approach they have taken.”

Doctor Rob Grenfell, National Cardiovascular Health Director at the Heart Foundation agreed:

“Any suggestion that national or international guidelines should be changed on the basis of the PURE data is absolutely contrary to global best practice,” said Dr Grenfell.

“This PURE study is based on observational data. It is universally accepted that guidelines are based upon the best evidence and that means the trial data.”

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