



*World Consumer Rights Day 2015:  
Consumers Rights to Healthy Food*

*Briefing no. 2*

*Reducing salt consumption*

**About Consumers International**

Established in 1960, CI is the world federation of consumer rights groups. Our goal is to ensure that consumer rights can never be ignored. With over 240 Member organisations spanning 120 countries, we serve as the only independent and authoritative global voice for consumer rights. We are a registered UK charity.

***As part of a package of measures required to protect and promote healthy diets CI is calling for the introduction of national targets for the gradual reduction of salt content in processed foods and for education, communication and public awareness programmes to encourage a reduction in salt intake.***

### **Why is salt a problem?**

**If salt consumption were reduced by 6g per day, an estimated 2.5 million deaths could be prevented each year.<sup>1</sup>**

Increasing production of processed food, rapid urbanisation, and changing lifestyles are transforming dietary patterns. Highly processed foods are increasing in availability and becoming more affordable. People around the world are consuming more energy-dense foods that are high in fats, sugars, and salt.<sup>2</sup>

In some countries dietary salt comes primarily from processed foods, either because they are particularly high in salt (such as ready meals, processed meats like bacon, ham and salami, cheese, salty snack foods, and instant noodles) or because they are consumed frequently and in large amounts (such as bread and processed cereal products). In other countries the main source of salt intake is salt that is added to food during cooking (bouillon and stock cubes) or at the table (soy sauce, fish sauce and table salt).<sup>3</sup> Most people consume too much salt—on average 9–12 grams per day, or around twice the recommended maximum level of intake.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence has shown that regularly eating too much salt puts us at increased risk of developing high blood pressure (hypertension).<sup>5</sup> Raised blood pressure is the biggest cause of cardiovascular disease, and accounts for 60% of all strokes and 50% of all heart disease.<sup>6</sup> The [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int) (WHO) rates high blood pressure as one of the most important causes of premature death worldwide and the problem is continuing to grow.

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<sup>1</sup> He, F. & MacGregor, G. (2009) A comprehensive review on salt and health and current experience of worldwide salt reduction programmes. *Journal of Human Hypertension*, 23 (6) pp363-84

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (2014) *Salt reduction* [online], WHO. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs393/en/>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> World Action on Salt & Health (n.d.) *Salt and your health* [online] WASH. Available at: <http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/salthealth/>

<sup>6</sup> World Action on Salt & Health (n.d.) *Salt and blood pressure* [online] WASH. Available at: <http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/salthealth/factsheets/bloodpressure/index.html>

Around 640 million people have high blood pressure in low and middle income countries and about 330 million people in high income countries.<sup>7</sup> Five million people don't know they have the condition.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that there will be 1.56 billion adults living with high blood pressure by 2025.<sup>9</sup>

The WHO Global monitoring framework on NCDs<sup>10</sup> urges Member States to work toward a target of a reduction in the global population's intake of salt of a relative 30% by 2025. The WHO maximum recommended daily intake of salt for an adult is 5g per day<sup>11</sup>. Average intake is currently 9 – 12g per day.<sup>12</sup> The WHO recommended maximum daily intake of salt for children aged 2-15 is 2g per day<sup>13</sup>.



Reducing salt intake has been identified as one of the most cost-effective measures countries can take to improve population health outcomes and **has been identified as a priority intervention and listed as a 'best buy' in NCD prevention.**<sup>14</sup> Key salt reduction measures could generate an extra year of healthy life for a cost that is below the average annual income or gross domestic product per person.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, most countries have yet to take effective action.

### What is CI calling for?

CI is campaigning for a Global Convention to protect and promote healthy diets<sup>16</sup>, using a similar mechanism to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. A Global Convention would commit governments to a package of policy measures designed to help consumers eat more healthily. This would include: restrictions on food marketing to children; nutrition labelling; provision of better food in schools and public institutions and consideration of fiscal tools to promote healthier eating. A Global Convention should also include measures to reduce salt intake (see over):

<sup>7</sup> World Heart Federation (n.d.) *Hypertension* [online] World Heart Federation. Available at: <http://www.world-heart-federation.org/about-cvd/risk-factors/hypertension/>

<sup>8</sup> World Action on Salt & Health (n.d.) *Salt and blood pressure* [online] WASH. Available at: <http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/salthealth/factsheets/bloodpressure/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Chockalingham, A. et al., (2006) Worldwide epidemic of hypertension, *Canadian Journal of Cardiology* 22 (7), pp. 553-555

<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization (2013), *Draft comprehensive global monitoring framework and targets for the prevention and control of noncommunicable disease* [online] Available at: [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA66/A66\\_8-en.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA66/A66_8-en.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization (2013), *WHO issues new guidance on dietary salt and potassium* [online] Available at: [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2013/salt\\_potassium\\_20130131/en/#.UQgmEiMid2M.twitter](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2013/salt_potassium_20130131/en/#.UQgmEiMid2M.twitter)

<sup>12</sup> He, F. & MacGregor, G. (2009) A comprehensive review on salt and health and current experience of worldwide salt reduction programmes. *Journal of Human Hypertension*, 23 (6) pp363-84

<sup>13</sup> World Health Organization (2012) *Guideline: Sodium intake for adults and children* Available at: [http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sodium\\_intake\\_printversion.pdf](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sodium_intake_printversion.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization (2014) *Salt reduction Fact sheet N° 393 September 2014* <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs393/en/>

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Consumers International and World Obesity Federation, (2014) *Recommendations Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets* [online]. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/nkafurp>

- **The introduction of national targets for the gradual reduction of salt content in food products**  
Targets should be set by the government, via a process free from any conflict of interest. Those products that make the largest contribution to the population's salt intake should be prioritised.
- **Education, communication and public awareness campaigns** so that people of all ages know the danger of high salt diets and are equipped with the skills to select and prepare foods that are not high in salt.

## Examples of salt reduction policies

### Hungary

Hungary introduced a Public Health Product Tax in 2011 that referred to the salt content of various processed food products and drinks. The products to which this tax applies cannot be sold in schools.

### South Africa

In 2013, the South African Department of Health adopted regulatory targets for salt reduction in 13 different food categories. A stepped approach is being used - food manufacturers are being given until 2016 to meet one set of targets and until 2019 to meet the next.

### Paraguay

Also in 2013, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Wellbeing in Paraguay enacted a mandatory reduction of 25% of salt content in wheat flour used in widely consumed bread and wheat-based products. Companies had to switch to using wheat flour not exceeding 1.5g of salt per 100g by June 2013.

### Argentina

In Argentina, a law adopted in 2013 defines maximum levels of sodium permitted in meat products, bread and flour-based products, soups, seasoning mixes and tinned foods. This law is also applicable to food sold in restaurants. Penalties for infringing the law include fines of up to one million pesos and the closing of the business for up to five years. In addition, there has also been the introduction of low-sodium salts in salt shakers in restaurants.

## Ideas for actions

### Salt surveys

Survey levels of salt in processed foods that are popular in your country and compare against the WHO's recommended maximum 5g salt per day. In those countries with nutrition labelling, this survey can be undertaken using the information on labels. If you have the budget, you could arrange for certain products to be tested for levels of salt. In some countries, companies provide nutrient values online.

For example, in the UK one slice of a BBQ Meat Feast Large Stuffed Crust pizza contains 1.77g of salt.<sup>17</sup> That means that three slices would be more than the WHO recommended maximum salt intake for an adult for an entire day.

'Hidden' salt is a real problem. Many people, for example, are not aware of the high levels of salt in bread. Take the leading brand of bread in your country, and work out how much an average person may eat in one day. Then calculate the amount of salt that they are consuming on a daily basis from bread alone.

### Link your action to World Salt Awareness Week

WCRD falls the day before the commencement of World Salt Awareness Week, which runs from 16<sup>th</sup> -22<sup>nd</sup> March. If you are planning an action on salt you might like to think about how to link the two events.

### Further reading

All of the policy examples used in this briefing are taken from the World Cancer Research Fund International online Nourishing Framework. See these and more: <http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework/improve-food-supply>

See the World Action on Salt and Health website for more background information and more on World Salt Awareness Week: <http://www.worldactiononsalt.com/>

World Health Organization Fact Sheet on Salt Reduction:  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs393/en/>

WHO interactive world map showing prevalence of raised blood pressure:  
[http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive\\_charts/ncd/risk\\_factors/blood\\_pressure\\_prevalence/atlas.html](http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive_charts/ncd/risk_factors/blood_pressure_prevalence/atlas.html)

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<sup>17</sup> Value taken from Pizza Hut online guidance

[http://www.pizzahut.co.uk/Delivery/menu/pdf/Nutrition\\_Pizzas\\_Delivery\\_P2W2\\_1415.pdf](http://www.pizzahut.co.uk/Delivery/menu/pdf/Nutrition_Pizzas_Delivery_P2W2_1415.pdf)