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The **business address** of the Salt Skip Program is Queensland Hypertension Association
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Use the **academic address** when writing about **salt control**—see the panel on page 4.

From the Editor's desk



In my new role as Editor of SSN I would like to include regular columns along the lines of the following

- News from science
- News from industry
- Consumer comment – what works for you, a low salt diet in action
- New recipe to try/adapting old
- New foods on the market
- Comment from the editor - short and possibly witty (no guarantees!)

In this issue we have contributions from Elizabeth Dunford from The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) and Megan Cobcroft Nutrition Manager, Unilever Australasia. There is also a low salt recipe for spring.

AWASH, founded in December 2005, is a growing network of individuals and organisations concerned with salt and its detrimental effects on health. In May 2007, AWASH launched a 5-year salt reduction campaign. The Drop the Salt! campaign unites health professionals, the food industry, government, scientists and consumer organisations in a commitment to action to reduce salt intake in Australia.

Salt and Cancer

The Cancer Council has recently released a position statement on salt and cancer see. The **Key Message** states “Both salt and salt preserved foods are *probably* associated with an increased risk of stomach cancer. Salt is also a leading cause of high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

The Cancer Council supports the recommendation made by the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) Dietary Guidelines that people choose foods low in salt, and recommends that people avoid adding salt at the table or in cooking.

The Cancer Council supports efforts to reduce population salt intakes, particularly through reducing salt levels in processed and takeaway foods.

For general health and wellbeing, people should aim to consume no more than 2300mg of sodium (6g of salt) per day.”

The full position statement is available at the following web address

<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=2453>

AWASH salt reduction strategies

Did you know that just one sausage sandwich could contain more than your daily recommended intake of salt? Elizabeth Dunford, Research Assistant for the Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) discusses AWASH's plans to work with the food industry to reduce salt in processed foods.

Australians are currently consuming around nine grams of salt each day, well above the recommended six gram maximum for overall health. The majority of salt in Australian diets (75-85%) comes from processed foods, including processed meats, bread and fast food. The remaining 15-25% comes from salt added during cooking or at the table.

The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH) seeks to improve the health of the Australian population by achieving a gradual reduction in dietary salt that will reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases and other salt-related health problems. AWASH seeks to achieve this mission by promoting the benefits of salt reduction throughout all sectors of the Australian community, including industry, consumers, scientists, healthcare workers, government, regulatory bodies and professional organisations.

As the majority of salt is in processed foods, one of AWASH's key objectives is to work with the food industry to reduce the sodium content of processed foods by an average 25% over the next five years. To establish the best way to do this, AWASH is consulting with major food companies and industry organisations in Australia to develop a food industry strategy to reduce salt in processed foods and salt use by the catering industry.

In order to monitor progress with salt reduction in the food industry, AWASH has set up a database to record the sodium content of processed foods sold in Australian supermarkets. This database presently contains nutrition information of over 13,000 products, and will be used to track changes in the salt content of processed foods over time.

Using the database, AWASH prepared a "Sausage Sizzle" key findings document that highlighted the high salt content of

foods traditionally consumed at an Australian barbecue. It showed that only 2% of sausages on Australian supermarket shelves had acceptable salt levels, and that one sausage sandwich could contain up to as much as six grams of salt, 100% of the maximum daily recommended amount for adults and almost double that recommended for children.

The "Sausage Sizzle" document was the first in a series of reports revealing salt levels across different food products that will be produced over the next few years to highlight the food categories contributing high levels of salt to the Australian diet, as well as food categories that have made progress in salt reduction. See links below to read more.

With the majority of salt in the Australian diet coming from processed foods, any reduction in the amount of salt used by the food industry promises to be a highly effective strategy to reduce the burden of cardiovascular and other salt-related diseases in Australia. AWASH is next calling on government to take a leading role and set salt reduction targets for the food industry.

http://www.awash.org.au/documents/Sausage_Sizzle_Key_Findings_July_2008.pdf

http://www.awash.org.au/media_release_2008_07_11.html

AWASH is the Australian division of the global WASH group (World Action on Salt and Health).

Elizabeth Dunford is the Research Assistant for AWASH. She has worked in the area of nutrition research for the past 3 years and has a background in both nutrition and public health. She has worked as a nutrition researcher for Food & Nutrition Australia, as well as the Centre for Overweight and Obesity (COO) and the Centre for Physical Activity and Health (CPAH).

Food Companies - Taking up the Challenge to Reduce Salt

By Megan Cobcroft, Unilever Australasia

As you know about three quarters of the salt we eat today comes from processed foods such as breads, cereals and ready prepared products (1). For this reason, food companies play a crucial role in helping Australians eat less salt. But how easy is it to take salt out of foods and what are food companies doing to achieve this?

Why is salt added to foods?

Taste is probably the most important role of salt in food products today although some products may require salt for other purposes such as preservation. A preference for salty taste depends on how much salt you are used to eating, and research shows that your preference changes. If you switch to lower salt foods, your taste buds adapt and the higher salt foods become unacceptable (2,3).

However, salt provides more than simply saltiness. It helps to intensify the food's overall flavour and lessen any bitterness (4,5,6). For this reason, reducing salt can affect the overall taste of a food, not just its saltiness (7).

How do you reduce salt in foods?

Food companies can either remove salt in gradual steps to allow for taste adaptation or in one step to a level at which no change in taste can be detected. The amount of salt that can be removed before you notice a change in taste will vary greatly from food to food. For example, it is easier to remove salt from high salt foods than foods with an already lower salt content. It is more difficult to remove salt from bitter tasting foods because salt plays an important role in making these foods taste less bitter. Nevertheless it should be possible to make small, gradual salt reductions (5-10%) without a noticeable change in flavour. To

make larger salt reductions (up to 30% at a time), food companies need to use a combination of ingredients including *salt substitutes*. Salt substitutes provide a salty taste but without the negative health effects of sodium chloride. They are also available in supermarkets to add to food at home (e.g. Diet Rite Salt Lite). However, their use is limited because of their bitter taste and considerable expertise is required using flavours and other ingredients to try and mask this bitterness and make the food tasty. Nevertheless, using salt substitutes can allow food companies to take more salt out of a food product at a time. The challenge food companies now face is removing more than 30% of the salt at a time. Research in this area is continuing.

In the meantime, many food companies have already started to take salt out of their products. While many of these foods are not yet low enough in salt to be called "Low salt" foods as per the FSANZ definition of less than 120mg sodium/100g, they still contain significantly less salt. They may be labelled as "Reduced salt" or carry the Heart Foundation Tick which indicates that they are lower in salt than similar products on the supermarket shelf. They are not the lowest in salt but provide a healthier choice to help individuals take the first steps towards a low salt diet.

Megan Cobcroft is an experienced accredited practising dietitian (APD) and has worked at Unilever Australasia for 10 years. She has the role of Nutrition Manager with responsibility for providing nutrition expertise in the development of food products and health and nutrition related communications.

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continue to be distributed
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Cooks' Corner



Stir-fry Vegetables make a great vegetarian dish that's quick to cook Serves 4

- ❖ 1 tsp sesame oil
- ❖ 2 tsps vegetable oil
- ❖ 4 stalks celery, sliced diagonally
- ❖ 1 red capsicum, cut into strips
- ❖ 1 green capsicum, cut into strips
- ❖ 5 shallots, cut into 2cm lengths
- ❖ 2 carrots, cut into strips
- ❖ 1 clove garlic, crushed
- ❖ 2cm piece fresh root ginger, chopped
- ❖ 1 tsp chinese five-spice powder
- ❖ 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- ❖ 2 tbs chopped parsley

Method

1. Heat sesame oil and vegetable oil in a large non-stick frying pan or wok
2. Add all vegetables and spices, except mushrooms and parsley and cook stirring all the time until vegetables are tender but still crisp, about 3 to 5 minutes
3. Add mushrooms and parsley and cook for a further 1 to 2 minutes
4. Serve with rice or low salt noodles.
5. For a non-vegetarian option stir fry some strips of pork, beef or chicken quickly first (approx 100g for 4).
6. Remove from the pan then wipe out and stir fry vegies as above and then add back the meat.

Thanks (again) to Caryl Nowson

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