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From the Editor's desk



Welcome to the Christmas 2008 Issue of Salt Skip News. In this issue we have contributions from Caryl Nowson from Deakin University in Victoria and Jacqui Webster from The Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health (AWASH). There is considerable concern about the amount of salt Australian children are consuming. There are also some recipes for the Christmas season. While ham does not fit into a low salt eating pattern many of the other traditional Christmas foods e.g. plum pudding, mince pies, Christmas cakes and stuffing for the turkey can all be made salt free.

Christmas in Ireland where I grew up was a very exciting time of the year. As children we always hoped for snow. There was lots of food and everything was home made we even boiled our own ham. I can remember eating warm ham sandwiches on Christmas Eve. Preparations started early, the fruit for the puddings and cakes had to be soaked and some of the fruit kept to make mince pies. Almond icing for the cake was made from ground almonds and sugar and the white icing and decorations added

just before Christmas. We had to find the sliver sixpences and threepenny pieces from the previous year for the plum pudding. We poured whiskey over the pudding and set it alight just as it was served. The house was decorated with holly and there was mistletoe in the hall and a Christmas tree. There was a red candle in the window on Christmas Eve. I remember shiny new pennies and exotic fruit such as satsumas in my stocking. Family and friends from Ireland often ask if I go to the beach on Christmas day. I try to explain that Christmas in Australia is very similar to Ireland except that it's usually sunny and warm and everyone wears summer clothes and sunglasses. They have seen pictures of Christmas barbecues and cricket on the beach in Australia and remain unconvinced about the similarities. I would like to wish you all a safe and happy Christmas. Nollaig Shona agus Athbhliain faoi Mhaise Duit (*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in Irish*)



Action on sodium reduction in Australian food products is urgent!

Research from Ms Carley Grimes, Professor Caryl Nowson, and Associate Professor Mark Lawrence at Deakin University, Victoria

The National Heart Foundation of Australia advises a maximum intake of 6 grams of salt per day for adults.¹ High salt intakes are one of the main causes of high blood pressure in Australia and high blood pressure is the biggest single cause of premature death and disability in the world.

We have recently undertaken an evaluation of the reported sodium content of Australian food products.² The findings from our study indicate that to decrease the Australian population's salt intake to 6 grams per day, the sodium content of most Australian food products will need to be reduced. We assessed the sodium content of Australian food items, trends over time and compared this content with sodium targets established by the UK Food Standards Agency who have a national campaign to reduced sodium intakes to 6 g/day.

In our study, the sodium content indicated on food labels were collected from 2005 to 2007. Fifty-three percent of food products had sodium levels above the targets. Food sub-categories containing <20% of products meeting the targets were white bread, whole-meal bread, cream cheese, low fibre breakfast cereal, savoury snack biscuits, hot dogs, sausages, canned soup, canned beans and spaghetti and canned vegetables. From 2005/06 to 2007 the only food sub-category to significantly decrease in reported sodium content was pre-prepared meals: Asian with accompaniment (43%, $P=0.048$ Australia had a lower number of food products that met the sodium targets compared to the UK (46% v 56%) and over half remain above the recommended target. A reduction in the sodium content of

bread, low fibre breakfast cereals, and a number of processed snack, meat and canned goods is needed to reduce the average salt intake to 6g/day.

Our results indicate that a collaborative approach involving the food industry, government and health professionals is needed to encourage the manufacture of low salt products. To date there are limited published data available on the sodium content of Australian food products. The findings from this study provide baseline data from which to monitor the sodium content of food products in the future.

References See page 4

Aussie kids are eating dangerously high levels of salt

Professor Bruce Neal,
Ms Jacqui Webster and Ms Elizabeth
Dunford
Australian Division of World Action on
Salt and Health

The recently released 2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey (1) showed that boys and girls in every age group are eating much more salt than is recommended (see Table 1). Boys and girls aged 14-16 years were found to be eating an average of more than 9 grams of salt and 6 grams of salt respectively each day; even more than the 6 gram recommended maximum intake for adults.

Salt and children's blood pressure

There is good evidence that a high salt intake can push up blood pressure from birth. The harmful effects of salt on blood pressure in children track through into

adulthood (2) and salt appears to be one of the main reasons that blood pressure rises with age (3). In Western societies like Australia, average systolic blood pressure amongst people in their 60's and 70's (140-150mmHg) is a quarter to a half greater than it was in their teens (100-110mmHg). This rise is almost certainly preventable and much of it could be averted by reducing salt intake.

Salt and childhood obesity

One of the more interesting recent research developments relating to salt and children has been the link between salt consumption and childhood obesity. There is a well established association between daily salt consumption and fluid intake in children. The connection between salt intake and childhood obesity is thought to be related to the types of fluids that children drink, particularly the consumption of sugar sweetened soft drinks (4).

A recent UK study of 4-18 year olds found that each additional 1g of salt eaten each day meant 100mLs more fluid consumed (4). About one third of the additional fluid consumed was sugar-sweetened soft drinks. It was calculated that decreasing daily salt consumption in children by 3g would reduce energy consumption by 250kcal/week. This means, salt reduction may have an important role to play in the battle against childhood obesity.

The benefits of reducing children's salt consumption

Reducing salt from children's diets is highly feasible and even small reductions would reap huge gains (5). There is very clear evidence that children's blood pressure levels can be reduced by moderate reductions in dietary salt consumption (6).

Reducing population salt consumption will rapidly reduce blood pressure levels and swiftly lower the risk of heart attack and stroke in older individuals (7). If the children of today keep their salt consumption down to recommended levels, they can expect about half the risk of premature cardiovascular disease of their parents.

Where the salt's coming from and how to avoid it

The majority of salt in the diets of Australian children comes from processed and takeaway foods. Children's takeaway meals from the leading Australian fast food outlets may, for example, contain up to three quarters of the recommended maximum daily intake in a single serve. With such high levels of salt in most of these products, and many of those specifically advertised to children, the likelihood of keeping salt out of children's diets is very limited. **References: See Page 4**

Table 1: Recommended and actual salt intakes for Australian boys (grams)

Age	Recommended upper daily limit (g/day)*	Actual intake (g/day)^	Percentage of the upper daily limit
1-3 yr	2.50	4.23	169
4-8 yr	3.50	5.57	159
9-13 yr	5.00	7.23	145
14-16 yr	5.75	9.18	160

*Nutrient Reference Values for Australia and New Zealand 2006

^National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey



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GRAVY

- 🍴 1 small onion, diced
- 🍴 ½ cup chopped celery
- 🍴 1½ cups unsalted home-made chicken stock
- 🍴 2 tsps arrowroot or cornflour,
- 🍴 cayenne pepper to taste
- 🍴 teaspoons of olive oil (or similar)

Method

- 🍴 Pre heat oil in a non-stick frying pan.
- 🍴 Add onion & celery and cook, stirring until vegetables are brown
- 🍴 Blend 2 tablespoons chicken stock & arrowroot, stir until dissolved.
- 🍴 Stir dissolved arrowroot & remaining stock into vegetables & bring to the boil.
- 🍴 Lower heat & simmer for 5 minutes.
- 🍴 Allow to cool slightly
- 🍴 Pour into blender/food processor and process until smooth.
- 🍴 Return gravy to pan & reheat`
- 🍴 Add cayenne pepper to taste.
- 🍴 For tomato gravy, add 1 tablespoon unsalted tomato paste

Handy Tip

- 🍴 'Reducing' the stock as a way to increase flavour, i.e. let it simmer gently to evaporate some of the water and thus concentrate the flavour. This can be stored in ice cube trays in the freezer

RAISIN AND NUT STUFFING

- 🍴 2 tsps salt free margarine,
- 🍴 1 onion, chopped
- 🍴 50g raisins, roughly chopped,
- 🍴 60g mixed nuts, finely chopped
- 🍴 1 tsp chopped parsley
- 🍴 50g cooked rice (preferably brown)
- 🍴 Skim milk to mix

Method

- 🍴 Heat margarine in a small non-stick saucepan
- 🍴 Add onion and cook until softened slightly (about 3 minutes)
- 🍴 Mix in remaining ingredients adding enough milk to mix to a firm but slightly sticky consistency

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Article 1

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Article 2

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