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Do many Australians follow a low sodium diet?

The Australia Bureau of Statistics has recently released results from a comprehensive National Nutrition Survey conducted in 2011-12.

These surveys are relatively infrequent in Australia – the previous survey collecting dietary intake information from a large population sample (children and adults) was 1995. In the United States and recently in the United Kingdom, dietary survey data is continuously collected.

As part of the survey, participants were asked if they currently followed a diet. For men, 6.8% of 15-30 year olds stated they followed a diet, 11.7% of 31-50 year olds, 15.4% of 51-70 year olds and 9.6% of men who were 71 years and over. The corresponding percentages for women were higher - 10.8% for 15-30 year olds, 17.0% for 31-50 year olds, 18.7% for 51-70 year olds and 10.2% for women who were 71 years or older. Most people who were on a diet were following it for the purpose of weight loss (although this was proportionately lower for people aged 71 years or older).

Perhaps it is surprising that the percentage of people on a weight reducing diet is not higher – after all, the percentage of people who are overweight or obese in the Australian adult population is over 60%.

60%

Of the people who were currently on a diet, only a small minority were on a low salt or sodium diet. For people aged 15-30 years, only 1% of those who were currently on a diet (men and women) stated that they were on a low salt or sodium diet. This rose to as high as 10.1% in 51-70 year old men, and 14.1% in women aged 71 years or more.

Of course, for people who habitually follow any sort of dietary regime their dietary intake rapidly becomes normal to them. People following a long term low sodium diet may not think to answer affirmatively to a question about whether they are currently on a diet – for them it is their normal pattern of eating and nothing special.

But the implication is that only a small percentage of Australians follow a low salt diet – if you do, you are a member of an exclusive club!

Salt Skip

In view of the health benefits of lower dietary sodium – it would be so much more useful if less sodium was added to foods at their point of manufacture.

Other questions were asked in the national survey: About 30% of people respond 'very often' to the question 'how often is salt used in your household for cooking or preparing food?'.

However, when asked 'how often is salt added to food at the table?', more than two thirds responded rarely or never.

For those that use salt, more than half either don't use iodised salt, or are not aware whether the salt they use is iodised or not. [A good way to tell is by the colour of the packaging – by convention; predominantly green packaging is used for iodised salt worldwide.]

So ... apparently not many Australians follow a low salt diet, a large proportion of Australians use salt very often in their cooking or food preparation, but not many use salt on their food at the table.

For more highlight results from the National Nutrition Survey, go to www.abs.gov.au and search for National Nutrition Survey. There is a lot of interesting information to read on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website.

New research shows fast-food companies are using less salt in their products, but the reduction is too slow, say health experts.

A single Australian burger can contain more salt than an adult can safely eat in a day – and that's without chips.

Modelled sodium lowering in Holland

Dutch researchers have compared two strategies to lower the sodium intake of the population by modelling changes to the food supply. In the first scenario, the sodium content of processed foods is lowered as much as is practical. More lowering is practical in some foods than others, but the sodium content is lowered in processed foods by an average of 50%. In the second scenario, within groups of foods it was assumed that people ate the variety with the lowest sodium content.



Under the first scenario, the median adult population salt intake would decrease by 28% which would be accompanied by a 1.2% drop in blood pressure. For the second scenario (substituting low salt food instead of higher salt food), the median adult population salt intake would decrease by 35%, along with a 1.5% reduction in blood pressure.



These small reductions in population blood pressure were estimated to reduce heart attacks by 4-5% over the next 20 years, and stroke by 6-7%.

Sound small? Well, possibly not if you were the one who avoided the stroke or heart attack.... and the number of cases for Holland was 30-35,000 heart attacks, and 50-60,000 strokes. Sounds like this would mean a worthwhile reduction in use of health system resources, let alone the serious health issues averted.



Reference:

Marieke AH Hendriksen, Rudolf T Hoogenveen, Jeljer Hoekstra, Johanna M Geleijnse, Hendrik C Boshuizen, Joop MA van Raaij. Potential effect of salt reduction in processed foods on health. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2014;99:446-53

At Salt Skip News, we are always interested to hear from readers. Please send us your Salt Skip news, tips and salt-free or low sodium recipes...

In the News

Nutrition Survey Gives Insight on Australia's Diet

The Assistant Minister for Health, Fiona Nash, has welcomed the May 2014 release of the first nutrition results from the 2011-13 Australian Health Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Minister Nash said the data contributes to a better understanding of the diet of Australians. This can help frame efforts to encourage healthy eating and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease, which has a significant impact on our health system.

"While there are some positive indicators in this survey, nearly two in every three Australian adults and almost one quarter of children aged between two and 17 are overweight or obese," she said.

According to the nutrition results from the survey, discretionary foods – those foods that are not an essential part of the diet – contributed to approximately one-third (34.6%) of adults' and two-fifths (38.5%) of children's (2-18 years) energy intakes.

Discretionary foods include items such as cakes, sweet biscuits, lollies, chocolate, potato chips, take-away fried foods, many snack foods and soft drinks. These foods contain added saturated fat, salt, sugar or a combination of these.



"Reducing salt intake, in particular, is one of the most cost effective strategies for reducing non-communicable diseases, like heart disease," Minister Nash said.

"It saves lives, and even small changes can have a big impact on the health of Australians.

"A recent study published in *The Medical Journal of Australia* found the salt content of fast-food products in Australia had dropped by about two to three per cent between 2009 and 2012.

"While this is a positive step and shows Australian food manufacturers are serious about delivering better, healthier products, we recognise there's still a long way to go.

"Australia has already made progress to reduce the amount of salt and saturated fat in the food supply through reformulation, and I look forward to working with industry and the public health sector to progress this further," Minister Nash said.

News from TheCourier.co.uk Dundee 14th August 2014

Consuming too much salt leads to more than 1.6 million heart disease-related deaths around the world each year, research suggests.

Scientists based the finding on an analysis of 205 surveys of sodium intake in countries representing nearly three-quarters of the world's adult population.

Effects of sodium on blood pressure and cardiovascular disease risk were determined in a separate study of pooled trial data.

The average level of sodium consumption in 2010 was found to be 3.95 grams per day - nearly double the two grams recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In total, the researchers calculated that 1.65 million deaths from cardiovascular disease occurred each year as a result of consuming more than the WHO limit.

Lead scientist Dr Dariush Mozaffarian, from Tufts University in the US, said: "High sodium intake is known to increase blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases including heart disease and stroke.

"These 1.65 million deaths represent nearly one in 10 of all deaths from cardiovascular causes worldwide. No world region and few countries were spared."

Salt, used in cooking, sprinkled on food, or incorporated into food products, is far and away the biggest dietary source of sodium.

The research, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, showed that people in the US on average consumed 3.6 grams of sodium per day.

Sodium intake around the world ranged from 2.18 grams per day in sub-Saharan Africa to 5.51 grams per day in central Asia.

Co-author John Powles, from Cambridge University, said: "We found that four out of five global deaths attributable to higher than recommended sodium intakes occurred in middle- and low-income countries.

"Programmes to reduce sodium intake could provide a practical and cost effective means for reducing premature deaths in adults around the world."

Versatile Matzo Bread

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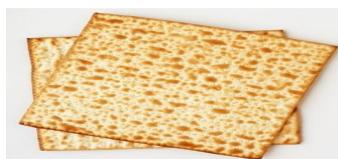
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Salt Skip News will
continue to be distributed
in hard copy in The BP
Monitor (QHA newsletter)



Have you discovered **salt-free** Matzo – unleavened bread that is traditionally eaten at Passover? The bread can be eaten as a quick snack or easy lunchtime solution, forms a great base for nachos and can be served as cracker biscuits for entertaining. There are also Matzo Ball Soup recipes to try; you can use a food processor to make Matzo into Matzo meal for use in meatloaf, cakes and desserts. The list is endless.

Use **salt-free** Matzo as it is or add some extra seasoning of your own.



For **nachos** try a blend of smoked paprika, cumin, salt-free garlic powder and ground cloves. Then top with mashed avocado, yogurt, slices of hot pepper, corn, and something crunchy like baked kale, chopped celery, zucchini, cucumber or tomato. Texture is key to nachos.

To make **cracker biscuits** with flavour use the same seasoning trick to make a flavored treat of your own design. Simply break the Matzo into cracker-sized pieces — long fingers or squares. Preheat oven to 375 deg F. Brush the tops with olive oil or whisked egg. Then season with any flavours you enjoy or a blend of sesame seeds, fennel seeds, caraway seeds, black pepper and salt-free garlic powder. Place in the oven for 5 minutes or so until the crackers turn a golden color. Enjoy!

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