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## Study shows way to cut salt consumption in an Australian town

**Researchers have found a promising new way to help Australians reduce the amount of salt they eat.**

The community-based programme, developed for Lithgow NSW by researchers from The George Institute for Global Health (TGI), reduced average daily salt consumption by two thirds of a gram.

TGI Food Policy Division leader Professor Bruce Neal said: "This may not sound like a big reduction in salt intake, but if applied across Australia would result in several thousand fewer heart attacks and strokes each year."

More than 100,000 heart attacks and strokes occur each year in Australia and about 45,000 lead to death.

"Drop the Salt Lithgow" used a community based approach to educating the community about the harms of salt and helping people to make a change. The team knocked on the doors of 500 people, manned booths in the malls, held meetings with large employers and encouraged people to use a salt substitute.

The sodium-reduced potassium-enriched salt substitute provided a focal point for discussions with the community.

"Salt for Life is a blend of sea salt and potassium salt that provides 70% less sodium than regular salt," said Jason Cummings of Nu-Tek Salt. "The great thing is that there's no compromise on taste which makes it easy for people to make the switch." Nu-Tek Salt was provided to bakeries and cafes for food preparation, and Salt for Life made available through doctors' surgeries.

Mean salt consumption in Lithgow fell from about 8.8 g/day to about 8.1 g/day.

Intake levels remained well above the World Health Organisation's recommended maximum of 5g/day and more than double the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's suggested dietary target of 4g/day.



## **Drop the Salt Lithgow (cont.)**

After the intervention Lithgow residents were more knowledgeable about salt levels and more people reported trying to control their salt intake.

“Using herbs and spices to season food and avoiding eating out were some of the strategies reported by the people taking part in the study. Nationwide reductions in the salt levels of some processed foods may also have contributed,” said Professor Neal.

Project lead, Mary-Anne Land noted the central role that the Mayor, local government, community groups and health workers played in getting the message out.

Lithgow Mayor Maree Statham said: “The health of the community is hugely important to me, so I saw this as a great opportunity for the people of Lithgow. The challenge for us now is to keep salt intake down.”

What a great effort by the people of Lithgow and the researchers from the George Institute!

A motivated individual can reduce their dietary sodium intake by a lot – but it is truly impressive when an entire adult community takes a step in the right direction.

Read more about the work of the George Institute at <http://www.georgeinstitute.org.au>

**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...**

## **TGI 5 tips for cutting down on salt**

- 1.** Use herbs and spices instead of salt
- 2.** Prepare your own food – that way, you control what goes into it
- 3.** Remove the salt shaker from on the table
- 4.** Use a low-sodium salt substitute
- 5.** Read labels on processed food and look for the lowest sodium value. A food with less than 120mg of sodium per 100g is a low salt food. More than 500mg/100g is high.



**Happy Christmas to Readers**

## Take care at Christmas time

Everybody enjoys Christmas time – for all sorts of reasons. A lot of people have holidays, it is a time to get together with family and friends, and it is a time to enjoy good food and drink and good fellowship.

But Christmas time and New Year are also well known to be dangerous. In the United States, mortality from natural causes has distinct spikes around Christmas and New Year.

**There are more emergency department deaths and dead on arrival to hospital on Christmas, the day after Christmas and New Year's Day than any other day of the year.**

For other types of death, there is a diffuse peak that starts just after Christmas and extends for more than a week into the New Year. The peak does not appear to apply to deaths due to cancer.

Over a 26 year period in the United States, there were 42,325 excess deaths in the two weeks starting with Christmas (i.e. 42,325 deaths more than would be expected based on the death rate for the rest of the year). This is not a trivial number!

The excess deaths are apparent for all age groups except for children.

What is the possible explanation for these observations?

It is possible that there is a change to levels of psychological stress around Christmas and New Year and this has an impact on mortality rate. However this would be required to operate across a wide age range.

It may be that Emergency Departments become overcrowded during holiday periods, and/or that many doctors and specialists take holidays and are not available for patients.

A 'postponement hypothesis' suggests that some people are able to postpone their deaths in order to reach symbolic occasions such as Christmas and New Year. If this were a major explanation of the mortality spikes, there should be a dip in mortality rates prior to symbolic occasions (and these were not observed in the US studies).

People who feel ill may delay seeking treatment until after their holidays - which could result in sicker patients than otherwise may have been the case.

Changes in dietary intake and alcohol consumption are a common feature of Christmas and New Year – however hospital patients also show a spike in mortality at Christmas and New Year.

The explanation for the marked increase in mortality across a broad range of common diseases at Christmas and New Year is not known. However, it is a reminder to all of us to be careful, don't overdo our celebrations and be grateful for friends, family and our time together.

### References:

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# Christmas Eve Punch

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**1.5lt Cranberry Juice**

**1lt Unsweetened Pineapple Juice**

**2 cups Orange Juice**

**½ cup sugar**

**2 teaspoons Almond Extract (available Health Food Shops)**

**1.25lt Ginger Ale (chilled)**

**Combine first 6 ingredients. Chill to serve. Add Ginger Ale and serve.**

**For a Christmas twist, add fresh fruit – sliced orange, lime, pineapple or festive season stone fruit pieces and serve in a Punchbowl.**

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