

Dispatch: Salt Slur, Fat Stasis, the Birds, and Social Smokers

By ACSH Staff — January 13, 2010

Salt Is the New Asbestos?

Mr. Bloomberg's war on salt has drawn the ire of many chefs who understand the nutritional and gustatory necessity of salt, so the New York City mayor decided to sidestep reasonable arguments and go straight to [comparing salt to asbestos](#) [1].

“He's trying to play on peoples' fear of asbestos as a lethal threat,” says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. “Without getting into [the science of asbestos](#) [2], we will just continue to point out that everyone needs some salt in their diet, and the fact that people ingest more salt than the government says we should is not necessarily a threat to public health. Those people with salt-sensitive hypertension should definitely restrict their salt or sodium intake. But drastically reducing everyone's intake is costly, unnecessary, and may actually be harmful to some.

“As for the Mayor's insistence that this is voluntary, I could quote ACSH's Jeff Stier from what few words he managed to get in in [yesterday's chaotic debate on CNBC](#) [3] and point out that NYC Health Department measures that start as voluntary soon become mandatory, which is something these chefs seem to understand as well.”

Obesity Not Actually Expanding

While obesity rates among adults in the U.S. are high, they have actually stayed the same since the late 1990s, [according to the Journal of the American Medical Association](#). [4]

“This is interesting,” says ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. “We hear so often that obesity is getting worse, whereas this is saying it hasn't gotten any worse for ten years. It's quite a departure from the popular wisdom and media reporting on the issue.”

“In general, the obesity epidemic of the last few years has been grossly exaggerated,” says Dr. Ross. “Obesity in this country is still a terrible problem among adults and children, but we've been led to believe that it has skyrocketed in the last few years, whereas it actually increased in the 80s and 90s and then plateaued. It would still be nice to try and fight this and reverse the situation, but it's not the crisis we were told it is. This isn't something that has suddenly happened because of sugary sodas or high fructose corn syrup.”

An Actual Threat

Government officials worry that there could be over 10,000 collisions between birds and aircraft this year. [The Associated Press reports](#) [5], “[That] would represent about twenty-seven strikes every day. There were at least fifty-seven cases in the first seven months of 2009 that caused serious damage and three in which planes and a corporate helicopter were destroyed by birds. At least eight people died, and six more were hurt.”

“The reason we're talking about this is that it is a real risk to human life,” says Dr. Whelan. “These are actual deaths that are occurring, and no one is paying attention to this issue as far as I can tell. They're too focused on the phantom threats of salt and trans-fats. There should be some technology to either avert or at least warn of such airborne threats.”

Part – Time Smokers

The number of “[part-time](#)” smokers is on the rise [6] as the habit becomes more and more verboten in public areas (and even some private ones).

“The main reason is that there are so many places where you can't smoke anymore,” says Dr. Whelan. “Half of the U.S. population lives in places where it has been banned from restaurants and bars, and 70% of people don't permit smoking in their homes. Even half of smokers don't smoke at home. This has caused a rise in the number of young people who don't consider themselves smokers, but anytime they're out socially where they can smoke, they do. With the price of cigarettes always increasing, smoking is an expensive, frowned-upon social activity.”

Dr. Ross agrees: “Children growing up in 1960s saw people smoking everywhere, practically all the time. Now, smokers are huddled in cold outside of their office a few times a day. It's a behavioral effect. If someone could quit smoking for a few weeks, they'd be off cigarettes, but there's a lot more to it than simple nicotine addiction.”

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[1] <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,582838,00.html>

[2] https://www.acsh.org/.../..../publications/pubID.1618/pub_detail.asp

[3] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBdWgVqcy5U>

[4] <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/2009.2014>

[5] <http://my.earthlink.net/article/pol?guid=20100112/e2c58575-3c59-47ec-bb68-bbcd92b7e30e>

[6] <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,582842,00.html>

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