Our sodium intake is just right, a new study finds

By ACSH Staff — April 23, 2014

The American Journal of Hypertension released new findings supporting that fact that the current sodium intake in the general population worldwide is appropriate. These results also uphold American Council on Science and Health’s long-standing view and our most recent [1] analysis of salt in diet.

The meta analysis [2], conducted by Niels Gradual and colleagues of Rigshospitalet-Copenhagen University Hospital, included 274,683 participants from 23 cohort studies, and two follow-up studies of randomized trials. The parameters for sodium intake were based upon a range consumed by 90% of the world’s population: low (less than 2,645 mg), usual (2,645 to 4,945 mg), and high (more than 4,945). The results of the analysis report lower risks of all-cause mortality and cardiovascular events for those within the usual group, compared to the low intake group. In addition, the high sodium intake group was linked to greater risks of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular events, stroke and heart disease, juxtaposed to the usual intake group. In sum, too little sodium, as well as very high sodium intake, can lead to adverse health outcomes. As confirmed by Gradual’s team, consumers have already struck the right balance in sodium intake. Researchers also note that there were no differences in terms of all-cause mortality risks between the upper and lower halves of the usual range.

However, the American Heart Association (AHA) stands by its advisory that everyone should restrict sodium intake to under 2,300 mg, or 1,500 in certain groups, warning consumers to be WARY of this new study. President elect of AHA and cardiologist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Dr. Elliot Altman comments, Given the abundance we have about excess sodium in diet and its relationship to hypertension and the ability of us as health professionals to recommend to patients that if they lower their blood pressure they will reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke, we are not distracted by these analyses [by the IOM] that have significant methodological flaws. Further, AHA CEO Nancy Brown cautions, In short, this new analysis of these studies should not be used as rationale to reverse public health policy recommendations.”

The authors of the study insist, The findings here lend support to those who have questioned the scientific basis for sodium reduction [recommendations], which are based primarily on the assumed blood pressure effect obtained in selected intervention studies and a selected meta-analysis of intervention studies.
Gradual's team references previous results, published by Cochrane review, supporting modest reductions in salt intake to improve blood pressure.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross had this comment: The AHA persists in its ivory-tower warning, which is both scientifically unsound and impractical to say the least, among humans who actually eat. Again and again we've seen studies showing that population-wide sodium restriction is fraught with potential consequences: while it may help some groups with severe high blood pressure or fluid retention, it may harm others. Further, the AHA's response is mere blather, as Dr. Altman immediately shifted the discussion from sodium restriction to the benefits of reducing elevated blood pressure. While the latter is indisputable, the former is at least a matter of academic discussion.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2014/04/23/sodium-intake-just-right-new-study-finds

Links