

New study supports a change in dietary sodium targets set by govt. agencies

By ACSH Staff — August 14, 2014



American consumers ingest, on average, about 3400

milligrams of sodium every day (similar to the diets of most recorded civilizations), well above the dietary sodium targets set by US government agencies and the American Heart Association of 1500 to 2300 milligrams or lower. However, there has been much debate about whether or not these recommendations are too strict, a position that [we at ACSH](#) ^[1] have long been endorsing. Last year, the Institute of Medicine [published a report](#) ^[2] stating that there are insufficient data supporting a benefit of sodium consumption below 2300 milligrams per day, and now a [new study](#) ^[3] published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* has come to the same conclusion.

Researchers led by Dr. Andrew Mente, clinical epidemiology and biostatistics assistant professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, tracked over 100,000 individuals from 17 countries in the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology study (PURE) for almost four years. Participants consumed an average of about 5000 milligrams of sodium per day. They found that sodium consumption under 3000 milligrams daily was associated with a 27 percent *increased* risk of death or serious event defined as heart attack or stroke, as compared to those individuals who consumed between 3000 and 6000 milligrams. It was only when sodium consumption increased to over 6000 milligrams that the risk of adverse outcomes was detected.

Sodium is an essential nutrient that is the key to many cellular functions, explains Dr. Niels Graudal, an internal-medicine specialist at Copenhagen University Hospital in Denmark. He explains that, paradoxically, too little sodium can actually result in high blood pressure, putting one at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease.

And on a related note, Brian Strom, chancellor of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences in New Jersey adds, There is not a single study, not one, showing [such a] benefit for having a sodium intake of less than 2300 milligrams. The current guidelines are based on these short-term studies showing that a low sodium diet results in reductions in blood pressure in people who are already diagnosed with hypertension or borderline high blood pressure, but these reductions may actually result in more harm than good.

This new study is now sparking the FDA to re-evaluate the research supporting the current guidelines, yet they say the agency continues to recognize the need to reduce the sodium content of the food supply to help reduce sodium intake.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan had this to say: It's clear that levels of sodium above a certain number may be harmful, but it's also clear that the targets suggested by government organizations currently are also too strict, and may actually result in harm to an individual. Average sodium consumption levels of Americans are probably just about right according to this new study. However, individuals should consult their own caregivers and discuss whether or not they should be worrying about these numbers, as a one size fits all recommendation is not appropriate in this case.

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[2] http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=18311&page=R1

[3] <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1311889?query=TOC#t=citedby>