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Monday, Nov 30, 2009

**HEALTH:**

**Cuts in salt would reduce stroke, heart risks: study**

[Back To Main Health](#)

Just an extra teaspoon of salt a day can spell a 23 per cent difference in the worldwide rate of stroke and a 17 per cent difference in the rate of cardiovascular disease, suggests new research.

The World Health Organization recommends that people consume only five grams of salt each day; that's about a teaspoon. But people in the West typically eat around 10 grams a day, and those in Eastern Europe consume even more.

While it's well-known that excess salt can raise blood pressure, the research has not been altogether clear on salt's direct relationship to stroke and heart disease. For an analysis appearing in the British Medical Journal, international researchers analyzed 13 studies that examined the link between salt and cardiovascular disease and stroke. The studies involved more than 170,000 people from six countries, including the United States, Scotland, and Japan.

The research was carried out jointly by the WHO's Collaborating Centre for Nutrition at the University of Warwick in Coventry, UK, and the European Society of Hypertension Excellence Centre in Hypertension at Federico II University Medical School in Naples, Italy. The researchers concluded there's a strong link between high dietary salt intake and increased risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease.

They estimate that reducing daily salt intake by just five grams could prevent more than 1.25 million fatal and non-fatal strokes around the world each year, and nearly 3 million cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks. Prof. Francesco Cappuccio, head of the Collaboration Centre at Warwick, said some food manufacturers are beginning to lower the salt content of several of their food items. "However, the progress towards the recommended targets has been slow," he said in a statement.

In order to really cut sodium intakes to WHO targets within a reasonable time, governments must bring in regulations, as well as lead health promotion campaigns, he said. That would help "reduce the burden of avoidable death, disability and associated costs to individuals and society caused by unacceptable high levels of salt in our diet."

Dr. Kevin Willis, director of partnerships at the Canadian Stroke Network, has said that cutting Canada's dangerously high salt intake is one of our most urgent public health matters and that it's time for the federal government to demand changes from manufacturers. "Although voluntary action by the food industry may be the preferred option to initiate sodium reduction, its absence calls for governments to use their regulatory capacity to bring about change," he and co-authors wrote in an article earlier this year in the Canadian Medical Association journal.

The recommended intake in Canada of sodium (not salt) is 1,500 mg a day for people between the ages of nine and 50. The average daily intake in Canada is more than double that level. (CTV)

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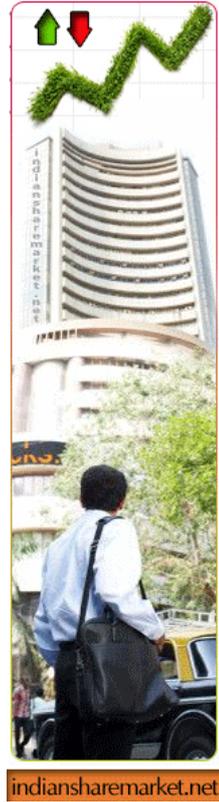
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