



**Salt Association**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

24 January 2008

EMBARGO: NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST UNTIL 28 JANUARY 2008

### **“SHODDY” CHILDREN’S SALT CAMPAIGN GETS IT WRONG**

**A UK campaign designed to influence vital nutrition policies affecting children’s health was today (28 January) condemned as “shoddy” and not supported by the very scientific study on which it is based.**

Citing an editorial appearing in the same journal at the time of publication of a study\* attempting to link salt with children’s health, the salt industry across the UK, Europe and North America said that the supposed link was entirely explained by the amount of food children ate.

The study (see editor’s notes for reference) being promoted by Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH) as part of National Salt Awareness Week actually shows that salt intake is correlated to children’s calorie intake. The relationship of blood pressure and salt entirely disappears when adjusted for calories.

**In the UK**, a spokesman for the Salt Association said: “It’s a shoddy campaign which misrepresents research that shows only that the amount of food children consume affects their health. Salt consumption is merely a by-product. To attempt to pressurise health policy on the basis of such conclusions is dangerous. The results claimed are variable and make no allowance for differences between the sexes and height that can greatly affect blood pressure. It isn’t new and it certainly isn’t helpful.

“Any correlations between food intake and health are simply statistical associations and not evidence of causation. Normally, such studies are used to generate a hypothesis that is then tested by formal controlled intervention studies to confirm

cause and effect. In this case, CASH has simply started with its preferred hypothesis that salt causes high blood pressure in children. That is simply not scientific.”

The industry also insisted that salt has an important role to play in helping to make vegetables palatable to many children. There is strong evidence to show that a balanced diet built around fruit and vegetables is the best way to tackle blood pressure and that salt intake then becomes irrelevant.

**In the United States**, Dick Hanneman of the Salt Institute said: “No matter the audacity of CASH’s approach nor the amplitude of the charges, the science just doesn’t say what it claims. Passion doesn’t trump data. Rather, it should be the other way around. The evidence shows a balanced diet promotes child development. The CASH campaign’s good sound bites tell us less about children’s health than about its determination to scare parents into ignoring good science.”

The research on which CASH’s current campaign is based has been questioned by the immediate past president of the International Society of Hypertension, Dr Michael Alderman who authored the editorial (see editor’s notes for reference). Dr Alderman cautions against advice that children should reduce salt, declaring: “I continue to believe firmly that solid knowledge based on evidence of benefit and risk must precede any clinical or public health intervention – particularly when it comes to dependent children.”

Alderman’s analysis of the CASH research, found that the actual increase in children’s blood pressure was a virtually null .5mmHg. Not only was this within the margin of error for any blood pressure reading, but when the data was adjusted for the amount of food the children consumed, the association disappeared completely.

The Salt Institute’s Morton Satin accused the UK Government of “tunnel vision single-nutrient focus” and failing to recognise that the real issue was the wider diet. If children can be encouraged to eat sufficient fruit and vegetables, salt is irrelevant,” he said. “Indeed, salt can make vegetables palatable for many children.”

**In Europe**, Wouter Lox of Brussels-based EU Salt said: “Poor interpretation of research is not a sound scientific basis for health policies which will affect a whole generation of children. Singling out one nutrient ignores a host of complex lifestyle and diet interactions. What we should be aiming for is a campaign which encourages

parents to persuade their children to enjoy a diet rich in fruit and vegetables while taking more exercise.”

Back in the UK, a recent review of no fewer than 462 papers from around the world found no conclusive proof of a link between salt and blood pressure. Dr Joel Dunning, a specialist registrar at James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough was quoted in the media as saying it was impossible to prove a connection between salt and heart disease because of a “lack of adequately powered randomised trials or observational studies conducted with sufficient rigour”.

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### Notes to editors

1. The study referred to in this release is: He FJ, MacGregor GA. Importance of salt in determining blood pressure in children: meta-analysis of controlled trials. *Hypertension* 2006; 48: 861-869.
  2. The study in which Dr Michael Alderman questions the interpretation of the data is: M.H. Alderman. Salt and Blood Pressure in Children, in *Journal of Human Hypertension* (2007), 1-3, doi:10.1038/sj.hh.1002269
  3. The Salt Association (previously the Salt Manufacturers' Association) is the trade association representing UK manufacturers of salt, including domestic salt, catering salt, water-softening salt, industrial salt and de-icing salt. More detail on its stance on the health issue can be found at [www.saltsense.co.uk](http://www.saltsense.co.uk).
  4. The Salt Institute is the North American-based global association of salt producers. Its position on salt and health can be found at <http://www.saltinstitute.org/28.html>
  5. EU Salt ([www.eusalt.com](http://www.eusalt.com)) represents the interests of salt producing companies across Europe. Members produce salt used in a multitude of applications ranging from salt used in the chemical industry, food grade salt, water softening applications and de-icing salt.
1. A string of experts across the world have previously questioned the UK Government's blanket advice, including:
    - Professor Tony Heagerty - immediate past president of the European Hypertension Society and president-elect of the International Society of Hypertension

- Nutrition expert, Dr David McCarron, whose research suggests that mineral deficiency, rather than salt consumption, is one of the most important influences upon high blood pressure.
- Professor Ron Maughan, sports scientist, Loughborough University. Researched sweating tendencies of footballers at premier clubs and found that some could lose up to 10g of salt in a single training session.
- Leading British physiologist, Professor Bill Keatinge, has found that, in unacclimatized elderly subjects, the risk of heart attack or stroke is increased by salt depletion during a heatwave. He suggests that they should be strongly advised not to reduce their salt intake in summer or when holidaying in warmer climates.
- Professor Ingo Fusgen, University of Witten-Herdecke in Germany. His studies show that up to 10 per cent of older people suffer from sodium deficiency.
- Professor Deiderick Grobbee, cardiovascular specialist from the Netherlands and author of the *Rotterdam Study* tested 8,000 people in their 50s+ and found that as long as their salt intake was no more than 16g a day, there was an insignificant effect on blood pressure. Those on low salt diets derived no improvement in cardiovascular health outcomes.