Reducing salt intake requires national and international efforts

Sirpa Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, Finland
Deaths attributed to 19 leading factors, by country income level, 2004

Reduction of salt is a very cost-effective way to improve public health

WHO: 30% reduction by 2025

Action: WHO, UN, EU
Salt reduction in Finland: History and principles

- Salt as a target for action for decades: recommendations, legislation, labelling, catering services, part of health education,
- Community-based interventions since 1960’ affect the structures of the society
- Target the whole population/age-group - not only risk groups
- Health in all policies and intersectoral mechanisms for implementation
- About 70-75% of salt comes from processed foods (inc. bread) so involving industry, catering and all stakeholder crucial
- Use all tools: legislation, fiscal policies and resources, information guidance, cooperation
Some actions to reduce salt intake

- Nutrition and cooking as part of mandatory education since 1970’s, health education since 2001
- Compulsory labeling of salt and warning labels (highly salty or large amount of salt added) for highly salted products since 1980’s, gradual tightening of limits
- National “low salt” claims until 2007, (when EU legislation on nutrition and health claims came)
- Voluntary “Better choice” -nutrition claims for foods since 2000 and for meals since 2007
Gradually setting tighter limits for "highly salted" warning labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current (1.6.2009)</th>
<th>Previous</th>
<th>Before 1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>... 1,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast cereals</td>
<td>1,6</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>... 2,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sausages</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>1,8</td>
<td>2,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Better Choice" - Heart symbol for meals

- Heart symbol for meals tested and launched in 2007, revised in 2009 to match procurement criteria.
- Helps customers to make healthy choices and caterers to offer and improve their services related to the nutritional quality of their meals.
- Based on nutritional recommendations; main focus on energy, fat and salt, includes customer information and tools for information.
- The right to use the symbol is granted by Finnish Heart Association (checks recipes, provides tools and education), fee to cover costs on non-profit basis.
## Nutritional quality criteria for main meals, upper limits for fat, SAFA and salt per 100g

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dish type</th>
<th>Fat, g</th>
<th>SAFA, g</th>
<th>Salt (NaCl), g</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soups and porridges(^1)</td>
<td>3(5)</td>
<td>1(1,5)</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casseroles, risottos, pasta dishes, sallads(^2), pizza</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>0,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steaks, rolls, pancakes, chicken</td>
<td>8 (12)</td>
<td>3 (3,5)</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dish with sauce; e.g. minced meat sauce</td>
<td>9 (11)</td>
<td>3,5 (3,5)</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values in parenthes are for meals with fish.

\(^1\) Cereal in porridges has to contain at least 6g dietary fibre per 100 g

\(^2\) Sallads have to contain at least 150g vegetables
Salt intake in Finland 1977-2007

- Calculated, men
- Calculated, women
- 24h urine, men
- 24h urine, women

Year


NaCl g/d

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18
Changes in 2007-2012:
Men p=0.006
Women p<0.001
Imports and exports of foodstuffs 1985–2014

Source: Finnish Customs
New legislation on labeling of salt (16.12.2016)

- Recalculation of salt content to match EU regulation on provision of food information to consumers (1169/2001)
- Following unpacked foods (in retail only) must state the total amount of salt %: 1) cheese, 2) sausages & meat cuts 3) bread
- Warning labels (highly salty” or “large amount of salt added”) if salt is above following limits: cheese 1,4%, sausages 2,0%, cold whole meat cuts 2,0%, fish products 2,0%, bread 1,1%, crisp bread 1,4%, breakfast cereals 1,4%, ready meals 1,2%, semi-prepared foods 1,4%, snacks 1,4%
- Warning labels have to be next to nutrient declaration, minimum font size 1,2 mm
Some current and future challenges

- Salt is invisible, how to make problem visible?
- EU set’s legal limits
- Global trade and marketing very strong >> global solutions and action needed
- Countries are in different stage of salt reduction, difficult to give general advice
- How to involve global industry, restaurants etc. ?
- Health literacy among public, policy-makers, media and civil servants in all sectors needs improvement
- National efforts have only limited value if not supported by international action