

# Taking action on salt and health

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE is the leading cause of death and disability in the world and raised blood pressure from a systolic above 115 mmHg is one of the most important direct causes, accounting for more than 60 per cent of all strokes and approximately 50 per cent of all heart disease.

This rise in blood pressure is due to an excess of salt in our diet, too little potassium, obesity and lack of exercise. High salt intake is a major cause of elevated blood pressure and the evidence demonstrating this is very strong, coming from epidemiology, migration, intervention, treatment trials, animal and genetic studies.

Based on this evidence, governments and the WHO (World Health Organisation) have recommended a reduction in salt intake from the current worldwide intake of 10 to 15 g/day to a maximum of 5 to 6 g/day. The benefits of this modest reduction in salt intake are large. For instance, a reduction in salt intake of 6 g/day through the fall in blood pressure that would occur would cause an approximate 25 per cent reduction in stroke and a 20 per cent reduction in coronary heart disease mortality.

Salt intake in most countries in the world is passive, that is, it is added to food without the consent of and, very often, without the knowledge of consumers. It is so ubiquitous now that it is difficult to avoid it, accounting for 80 per cent of many countries' salt intake. The only way to tackle this is by a slow reduction in the concentration of salt in all foods where it has been added.

Studies by the WHO have shown that reducing population salt intake by this approach is one of the most cost effective strategies for improving health and has the great attraction, from a public health perspective, that it does not necessarily involve a change in the public's consumption of foods.

Therefore, to encourage action on salt worldwide an action group, World Action on Salt and Health (WASH) has been set up based on the model that was developed in the United Kingdom (UK) of CASH (the Consensus Action on Salt and Health): [www.actionsalt.org.uk](http://www.actionsalt.org.uk).

This page compliments

**BHL**

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CASH was set up 10 years ago and consists of leading blood pressure experts in the UK as well as food technologists and individuals involved in food policy. It was the first organisation in the UK to call for a sustained reduction in the amount of salt added to foods in order to lower blood pressure and has largely been responsible for determining the Department of Health and Food Standards Agency

## Stick-to-it tips

THREE TOP TIPS for ensuring stick-to-it success on a new exercise programme.

**ONE:** Plan exercise for a specific time of the day.

**TWO:** Work out with a partner. Exercise is more enjoyable with a friend. It's also harder to quit when someone is depending on you.

**THREE:** Start slowly. If you have been inactive, start with only five to ten minutes and work up to more time as you get more fit.



**THE EXCESSIVE USE of salt in our diet is contributing to the rise in high blood pressure among Barbadians.**

of the UK current policy on salt reduction.

WASH was officially launched in October 2006 and currently has 180 members from 43 countries. Like CASH, it is composed of experts in high blood pressure, nutrition and public health. The **Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados** is a member of WASH and encourages all Barbadians TO GO EASY ON THE SALT.



**LIFE IS FUN WHEN YOU ARE FIT**  
Exercise every day. Swimming, skipping, outdoor games.

**GET UP - GET ACTIVE - GET OUT-**

**BE Fit - NOT FAT**

**Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc.**  
For more information call 437-3312

1 Julymeade Gardens, Jamaica Lane, St Michael • Website: [www.hfbs.org](http://www.hfbs.org)

# Low calorie diets - weighing the costs

## Part 2

THE BODY is always busy expending energy to maintain all processes of life and thus needs to refuel periodically.

During the event of energy deprivation, glucose stored in the liver as glycogen and fatty acids from the body's fat stores, flow into cells to fuel bodily functions. Once the glucose stores are depleted, the resulting low blood glucose concentration signals further fat breakdown for energy production.

All body cells, except for brain cells, are dependant on fatty acids for fuel. Again the body finds a solution by breaking down body protein to produce glucose, and if this is not sufficient it's forced to produce ketone bodies, which serve as fuel for the brain.

Ketosis causes loss of appetite, which explains why many of those on such low calorie diets often report that they are actually not hungry after a few days of following the diet. This stage

is also characterised by a metallic odour on your breath.

While the body is shifting to the use of ketone bodies, it simultaneously reduces its energy output resulting in a slow metabolic rate. Contrary to what most people believe, weight loss by means of energy deprivation may be quite dramatic but this is more due to the loss of lean body mass (muscle mass) and water - fat loss may not be that significant.

The implication of this is that you might be thinner but you also might end up being flabby. You may also experience dry or flaky skin, brittle hair, intense tiredness, bad breath, lowered body temperature, and a reduced resistance to disease - not really the picture of health, beauty and success that you envisioned is it?

Clearly going on a low energy diet involves much more co-operation and submission from the body than one would think, and a sad, harsh reality of life is that even after the facts have been laid down, for many the obsession to conform to the Western ideal of beauty and success will be greater than the concern for optimal health.

Unhealthy eating and lifestyle habits are not the result of some or other cataclysmic event, but are established over years and therefore undoing them will take time. Quick fix diet remains an oxymoron.

So after all has been said and done, again we return to the universal rules of well-being - follow a healthy lifestyle, exercise regularly and eat a balanced diet. Your heart will love you for it!

- by Lunelle Arendse  
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