

Salt & Health Forum

Paris, date – *The 'Salt & Health Forum' was held in Paris on 23 May. The event was organised by EuSalt, the European association of salt producers. The objective of this Forum? To review the relationship between salt consumption and health ...*

A link between the consumption of too much salt and hypertension has been suspected for some time. In order to clarify the various hypotheses in this respect, several scientific authorities presented the results of scientific research, which primarily demonstrate that hypertension is not solved just by restricting the intake of sodium.

Professor Tilman B. Drüeke emphasised that, despite the fact that it is undeniable that reducing salt consumption leads to a number of effects, its undesirable effects on the health of man are still a complete mystery.

In general, the medical profession is concerned with a possible correlation between salt consumption and cardiovascular mortality. However to date, no controlled randomised predictive studies have been done to tackle his question. Today we only have observational studies whose results have led to contradictory conclusions, which, according to Professor Drüecke, could lie in the fact that sensitivity to salt differs from one person to the next.

According to Professor Tilman B. Drüeke, efforts to reduce the risks of cardiovascular mortality should not only focus on ways to reduce salt consumption and on the importance of this reduction, but also on ways to ensure a healthy and balanced diet in the general population and on ways to combat the main culprits of cardiovascular mortality.

According to Professor Jens Titze, certain information seems to indicate that the response of the body to changes in salt consumption is more complex than would appear on first sight. Recent data indicate that the redistribution of salt in the body could help the homeostasis of the liquid volume and arterial tension. A diet rich in salt leads to significant Na⁺ retention, without leading to extracellular volume changes.

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The answer to the question of whether this phenomenon is a beneficial or adverse effect of salt consumption requires new, more detailed studies. An understanding of the mechanisms involved in renal regulation, independent of the Na⁺ equilibrium, could lead to a new understanding of the correlation between electrolytes, liquid volumes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

According to Professor David McCarron, cardiovascular mortality is not just solved by restricting sodium intake, but also by a diet rich in fruit, vegetables and low-fat dairy products. Such a diet has beneficial effects for several cardiovascular risk factors, contrary to those linked to sodium reduction, as well as a clearly superior benefit for arterial tension, cardiovascular mortality, and mortality from all causes.

The 'Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension' (DASH), which recommends a drastic reduction of sodium intake, eliminates sensitivity to salt in the majority of subjects at risk. Sensitivity to salt, which differs greatly from person to person, is not an indicator of the importance of restricting sodium, but rather a marker of an unbalanced diet.

According to Professor McCarron, national and international nutritional policies to improve arterial tension, cardiovascular diseases, and mortality from all causes, should focus on increasing the consumption of fruit, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, and not on limiting salt consumption, which may be associated with an increase in cardiovascular mortality and mortality from all causes in the general population.

According to Professor Niels Graudal, the proponents of restricting sodium intake and the sceptics have reached a consensus that restricting sodium intake may be useful in hypertensive subjects. The question remains as to whether the minimal effect of such a restriction in normotensive subjects (1 to 2 mm Hg) justifies recommending a restriction of sodium in the general population. A question that is far from being resolved, as was demonstrated by a recent review of epidemiological studies, which could not establish a correlation between sodium consumption and cardiovascular mortality.

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The speakers at the Paris "Salt & Health" Forum of 23 May 2007 were:

- Prof. Tilman B. Früeke, Inserm Unit 845 and Nephrology Division, Necker Hospital, Paris, France
- Prof. Jens Titze, Department of Nephrology & Hypertension, Friedrich-Alexander University, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany
- Prof. David McCarron, Department of Nutrition, University of California, Davis, CA, United States
- Prof. Niels Graudal, MD, Dr Med. Sci, Dept TA4242, National University Hospital, Copenhagen, Denmark.

About EuSalt

The non-profit organisation EuSalt is the European Salt Producers' Association and represents the interests of 21 salt producers located all over Europe. Being the voice of the salt industry in Europe, EuSalt provides authoritative information to the public at large and other interested parties about salt and its many uses. EuSalt also promotes the responsible use of salt and represents the industry as a whole at the level of the European and international institutions.

The association was founded in Paris in 1957 as the European Committee for the Study of Salt (ECCS) and was later re-baptised into the European Salt Producers' Association (ESPA). In the beginning of 2004, the association moved to Brussels and was renamed EuSalt. The association is managed by Robert Speiser, who is assisted by Office Manager Enrica Francesconi.

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