

*Comes - Kolata*

**SCIENCE**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE  
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13 April 1982

Dr. Henry Blackburn, Director  
Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene  
School of Public Health  
Stadium Gate 27  
611 Beacon Street, S.E.  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

*file.*

Dear Henry:

Thank you for your very courteous letter. I understand your concerns and, in fact, I believe Lot Page expressed some of your sentiments when he said, as quoted in my article, "I don't think you can wait for absolute certainty as a basis for public policy."

As I'm sure you realize, I did discuss the "crucial questions" with the scientists I interviewed. But the reason for my story was not to re-hash the familiar advice that people be prudent and reduce their sodium consumption. Instead, I wanted to examine the evidence that moderate sodium reductions will have an effect -- even on a population basis -- and to point out that many hypertension researchers are by no means convinced that low-sodium diets will make a difference to most people.

I agree that it is difficult to cut back on sodium when the food companies add salt with such abandon. I agree that it probably won't hurt most people to eat fresh fruits and natural foods rather than processed foods. But I think Science's readers are sophisticated enough to want to know what kind of evidence is in hand to support the claims that sodium reduction will prevent or ameliorate hypertension.

I am glad you wrote to me, however, and I did enjoy the articles by you and Arthur Leon. There are several minor points in the article on Diet and Hypertension that I question. First, I think that the latest report from the AHA's Nutrition Committee is more equivocal than it would

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seem from its inclusion in your list on page 49. Second, your theories on the origins of hypertension in American blacks seemed so extremely speculative as to detract from your article. Third, on page 13 you say that salt is used in the Roman Catholic Church in baptisms. As far as I know, this is no longer the case.

Your article on Physical Activity and Hypertension certainly demonstrates the enormous difficulty researchers have had in determining whether physical activity has any relationship to hypertension. I think Dustan's point was that we really don't know whether there is a relationship but that physical activity is just another factor complicating our attempts to make sense of the data on primitive people. She thought that the study she cited, however, was particularly well designed.

As to the balance of your articles, clearly it reflects your own bias, but I have known you for years and so I am familiar with your philosophical point of view. I enjoy hearing from all sides in these matters of controversy. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Gina Kolata

GK/fg