



Salt Institute

206 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

(703) 549-4648

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Sushma Palmer, D.Sc.
Director
Food and Nutrition Board
Institute of Medicine
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20418

Dear Sushma:

I hope our exchange at the "Nutrition and Public Health: Translating Science into Action" symposium sponsored by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion was not taken personally. I just could not allow your assertion to pass without response despite my deep respect for you and the Food and Nutrition Board. Actually, had time allowed an opportunity for questions on your own presentation, I had intended to ask a couple things.

You stated that epidemiological studies have shown that societies which consume 6 grams of salt daily have hypertension which increases with age and that, conversely, societies consuming less than 6 grams of salt a day do not reveal that pattern. I'd be interested in your data. The Intersalt data are rather clear on this point. They show that for the four primitive centers, where the highest daily sodium intake is 54 mEq, or about 1,250 mg of sodium--half the sodium contained in 6 grams of salt even if you exclude all sodium naturally occurring in their diets (which may well be most of their sodium in any case), there is the association you claim for societies under 6 grams. And, the data also show that the 48 civilized centers all show an age-related correlation between dietary sodium and blood pressure. What Intersalt does not show, and which data I'd love to see, is even a single reputable study that shows that correlation in populations between the primitive tribal consumption of 1,250 sodium and the amount of sodium an individual would consume on a 6 grams salt diet, which I would estimate at least 3,600 mg sodium, perhaps as much as 5,400 mg sodium. My point is that by reducing salt from about 7 grams a day today to the recommended 6 grams a day, about 14-15%, we would not be reducing it enough to achieve the benefits you claim for societies consuming less than 6 grams a day. In fact, I'm not even aware of which societies those might be. It seems unlikely that they have a lifestyle that is the recommended model for us in the United States. But I am willing to learn and would not like to make unsupported statements; please either send me the studies or give me the citations so that I might read them myself.

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My second question, of course, was the one that I raised with Laura Simms. I was very surprised that you made the assertion that the report intended to recommend a 2,400 mg sodium diet when, in fact, the report plainly recommends a 6 gram salt diet. I readily concede that six grams of salt contains about 2,400 mg sodium. But some researchers have claimed that total dietary sodium in this country (salt and sodium naturally occurring in other foods and water) totals up to 10 mg a day. We know that if every grain of food grade salt was ingested (and much is lost both in food processing and not ingested as, for example, the brine used to pack pickles), it would amount to about 9 grams a day. Actual ingestion of 7 grams is probably much more accurate. That means that today, less than 2,750 mg sodium a day comes from salt in the diet. I think 10 grams a day sodium is virtually impossible, but if it was half that much, then more than 2 grams a day of sodium comes from non-salt sources. Add that to the 2,400 contained in the recommended salt intake and you get 4,400-plus mg sodium; an actual increase in sodium consumption from the NRC's earlier 1100-3300 sodium "safe and adequate" range. When I returned to the office, I reviewed Diet and Health, particularly the recommendation on salt on page 28-15. Nary a mention of sodium, but much discussion of salt-induced hypertension and salt-sensitive people. Couple that recollection with the fact that the FNB brought as a featured presenter to the FNB's symposium the nation's foremost researcher on the subject of salt-sensitivity being different from sodium-sensitivity, Dr. Curtis Morris, and it becomes clear that the Committee intended to talk about salt, not sodium, and to make its recommendations at 6 grams of salt, not 2,400 milligrams of sodium as you contended at the ODPHP symposium. If I've missed something in my reading of the report, I'd be happy to have you so inform me.

Thank you for your presentation which provided another opportunity to discuss this most important policy matter.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Hanneman
President

cc: Dr. Samuel O. Thier, IOM

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