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### **Medical experts launch global campaign against salt**

194 medical experts from 48 countries around the world (1) have today joined together to launch a new global organisation, WASH - World Action on Salt and Health - in a concerted effort to reduce dietary salt intake to less than 5g per day per adult (the WHO target), in order to lower blood pressure globally.

Raised blood pressure is the biggest single cause of cardiovascular disease accounting for 62% of strokes and 49% of heart disease (2). Strokes and coronary heart disease kill more people around the world than any other cause of death - around 12.7 million people each year (3). It is estimated that reducing salt intake by 6g a day could lead to a 24% reduction in deaths from strokes and an 18% reduction in deaths from coronary heart disease, thus preventing approximately 2.6 million stroke and heart attack deaths each year worldwide (4).

In order to save these lives, the main aims of the new organisation will be to:

- Persuade international food companies to employ a global salt reduction plan, so that not only will the salt content of their processed food products be reduced but it will be uniform in each country they market in
- Ensure that the body of evidence from the scientific community about the dangers of excessive salt consumption, is translated into policy by each individual Government around the world
- Reduce salt added at home during cooking and at the table through a combination of media publicity and public health campaigns e.g. the Food Standards Agency campaign in the UK (<http://www.salt.gov.uk/index.shtml>)

WASH research has highlighted the huge variations in salt levels in the same food product purchased in different countries around the world (see tables at end of release). Some of the incredible discrepancies uncovered include:

- Kelloggs Coco Pops in Australia have 1.41g salt per 100g while the similar product in the UK contains 25% less salt (1.13g per 100g)
- Burger King Onion rings contain 150% more salt (1.26g per 100g salt) in Australia than the same product in the UK (0.5g per 100g)
- A McDonald's Cheeseburger in Australia contains 21% more salt than one in the UK and accounts for more than half (53%) of a six year-old's recommended daily limit (UK 1.31g per 100g) (5)

Professor Caryl Nowson, Deakin University, WASH member from Australia said "Why should people in Brazil have to eat cereal packed full of salt if we in Australia can have the same product with a fraction of the salt content (79% less in Kelloggs Frosties)? Why is it OK for Mexicans to have 2.5 times more salt in their McDonalds Chicken Nuggets than Australians? Why do Cheeseburgers, Onion Rings and Coco Pops in Australia contain significantly more salt than the same products in the UK.

The scientific evidence shows that eating too much salt leads to raised blood pressure, which in turn causes heart disease and stroke. High salt diets have also been linked to stomach cancer and osteoporosis. These huge variations in salt contents show that the excuses of the food industry •that it is technically too difficult to reduce salt, and that customers will not accept the reductions •are rubbish. WASH research shows food companies have reduced salt levels in some countries •we want them to reduce the salt in all their products in all their markets."

"The UK is currently leading the way in reducing salt," said Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of WASH. "The experience of Finland, which has had a salt reduction programme running since the late 1970s, shows that population-wide reduction of dietary salt leads to population-wide reductions in blood pressure and parallel reductions in deaths from stroke and heart disease. The American Medical Association has recently voted to work to reduce the amount of salt added to food by industry in the US by at least 50% in the next ten years. And the launch of WASH coincides with a World Health Organisation summit in Paris on October 5-7th to discuss the role of salt in global health. But if we are really going to save lives around the world we need to make sure that food producers make salt reductions in all their markets. I

am really encouraged by the number of individual experts who have joined WASH and the geographical spread of the countries involved. If we encourage the food industry in all these markets to make gradual reductions in the salt content of their foods, which is easy to do, as illustrated by Finland and the UK, then we will make a huge difference in people's health around the world."

WASH would like to work with the multinational food companies to ensure that the salt contents of their products are reduced across the world. The organisation is also keen to hear from other medical experts and health campaign organisations who wish to be a part of this global action to improve health.

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References:

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