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Salt Skip News

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Use the **academic address** when writing about **salt control**—see the panel on page 4.

From the new editor, Liane Colwell

I am thrilled to be invited to edit Salt Skip News. I have studied food marketing and gastronomy at masters level for the last 5 years, so writing for consumers will be a refreshing and enjoyable change. The former editor, Dr Trevor Beard, asked me to introduce myself.

I have always cooked, and my earliest hobby was entertaining (you have no idea how my family and friends suffered in the early days!). My earliest influences were Charmaine Solomon and Paula Wolfert. I dreamt of qualifying as a chef and creating a boutique catering business, and studied about 20 trade and post-trade courses during the 80s and 90s.

I am qualified in commercial cookery, chocolate and confectionery, smallgoods manufacture, hygiene, restaurant butchery and pastry, etc. The TAFE [technical college] and university courses were complemented by several industry-based training courses like cheese judging, and courses in botanical medicine and nutrition. In 2008 I will study Food Quality and Safety.

I have owned several catering businesses specialising in the exotic and regional cuisines of Morocco, Iran, Turkey, Mexico, the Caribbean and Spain. I have done parties for the biggest law and accounting companies in the world and for RSPCA and Clean Up Australia. I have cooked for celebrities and film stars in parties from 2 to 1600 people, some in very challenging

venues—boats, castles, warehouses, gardens, surf clubs—you name it!

I am used to solving problems in the kitchen and negotiating food preferences, and I draw inspiration from around the world. You can look forward to slow braises, festive fare and a million salads and vegetable dishes. Researching food choices has been a lifelong obsession and I will be happy to share some of my tips for adapting dishes to Australian ingredients.

A few highlights of my gastronomic career included a month last year in the Caucasus, gathering wild walnuts and apples, gorging on chestnut honey and eating at least 7 different dishes at every meal, and cooking in the King of Morocco's kitchen at *La Mamounia Hotel*, Marrakesh. I love the festal fare and delicious dishes that dance across the palate. When not acting as master of ceremonies at food-related events I am presenting or attending conferences on food or health. In the last year or so I attended conferences on Healthy Ageing and Longevity, Nutrition, Cookbooks as History, allergies, a food technology conference, the Oxford Symposium on Food & Cookery, Sweets China and many one-day seminars. I hope to continue to attend and report on these events for the readers. Send your suggestions about what should appear in these pages (email saltmatters@utas.edu.org).

Salt as a treatment for low blood pressure

by Dr Trevor Beard, Menzies Research Institute, Hobart

The saltmatters email discussion group gets some interesting questions from time to time (click [Email Discussion Group](#) in www.saltmatters.org for full details on how to join). Recently Martin Turner asked us about a work colleague with low blood pressure whose doctor had told her to eat more salt.

I remember reading that an American woman with high blood pressure sued her doctor for recommending her 20 years earlier to eat more salt as a treatment for low blood pressure.

I have no record of the verdict but the doctor may have been able to prove that the patient defaulted on follow-up (a very common problem unfortunately).

Women have lower blood pressure (BP) than men, and some even reach menopause with the BP of a fit teenager (100/60 or even 90/60) without any symptoms. Their BP has not risen with age. Societies have been discovered where nearly every adult has little if any rise of BP with age.

Societies with 100/60 at all ages

In 'salt free' (no added salt) societies BP remains at about 100/60 in every adult (not just a few women). *Salt Matters* describes (with references) one of the fittest human societies yet discovered (the Yanomama) who also have the lowest salt intake yet known. In the Intersalt study 195 Yanomama adults aged 20 to 59 had an average blood pressure of 96/61, and a zero prevalence of hypertension.

Drops in BP may cause symptoms

However there may be tiredness, lethargy, giddiness or fainting if the BP drops from a much higher level to 100/60 or less. To confirm the drop in

pressure, doctors measure BP when patients lie down and when they stand.

Injury causing shock can bring the BP below 90/60, especially with haemorrhage, and a few diseases can lower the BP seriously enough to cause fainting. It is the presence of *symptoms* that justifies treatment, but treatment will always depend on the diagnosis.

When the cause is medication for high blood pressure, the treatment is a lower dose or a different drug. Drugs for depression and diuretics may also interfere with postural reflexes.

Treatment with salt

Treatment must be tailored to each individual. Some patients respond to a salt intake that their palates can tolerate, but others may need more salt, preferably in Slow Sodium tablets (Novartis).

The enteric coating protects the stomach and releases salt slowly in the intestine. The dose should be monitored with 24-hour urine collections.

Salt can sometimes help when there is a malfunction of a part of the nervous system that regulates BP. It will not help when heart problems affect the heart muscle or the valves, or cause an abnormal rhythm. Patients with Addison's disease mainly need steroid hormone replacement to reduce their abnormal urinary salt loss.

Remember two things:

- a man avoiding salt strictly for hypertension might paradoxically have a partner using it liberally for low BP (both on medical advice);
- patients who are advised to use salt liberally because of low blood pressure should be warned that this carries a risk of hypertension if it is continued indefinitely without monitoring the blood pressure.

Nutrition Update—The AWASH salt debate

by Paul Jones, dietitian, Warwick, QLD

On 31 January at the George Institute for International Health in Sydney, over 100 people attended the debate on salt and children's health. It was organised as part of International Salt Awareness Week by AWASH (Australian Division of World Action on Salt and Health).

Participants included people from health, nutrition, food industry, food regulation and political backgrounds.

Senator Jan McLucas spoke on the upcoming National Diet and Physical Activity survey, which will assess the population's salt intake.

As the previous National Nutrition Survey in 1995 had no questions or measurements of salt intake there is not much information on salt consumption in Australia.

Dame Deirdre Hutton (chair of the UK Food Standards Agency) spoke on some of the successes of salt reduction campaigns in the UK. 70 food companies, and 75% of major food retailers have made commitments to reducing the salt content of packaged foods. The salt reduction strategies to date have saved an estimated 3500 lives.

Professor Bruce Neal (chairman of AWASH) highlighted the organisation's aim to reduce average salt intake to 6 grams per day (less for children).

High blood pressure is the single largest cause of death in the world, and dietary salt is the most important cause of high blood pressure.

AWASH's on-line survey showed that half the parents were concerned by the amount of salt in foods their children were eating. More than half the children were eating salty snack foods several times a week. AWASH would seek greater government involvement in increasing public awareness.

Dick Wells, CEO of the Food and Grocery Council, assured the meeting that the food industry would play its part.

Peter Tedesco (CEO) said Lowan Wholefoods had reformulated children's breakfast cereals, with a 62% reduction in one brand, and this and two new products are low salt foods now.

Jackie Healing of Coles spoke of their salt reduction policy of 25% within 5 years on private label products (3 years for children's foods), and continue sales of "no added salt" foods, and considering introducing the traffic light food labelling system.

However, several other issues were raised by the audience, including:

- The inappropriate marketing of gourmet salts by celebrity chefs and food writers;
- Whether the 6g per day target is too high, when lower levels of salt intake provide more health benefits;
- The need for better information on how much salt Australians are currently eating;
- The need for clearer food labelling. There was wide support for the traffic light food label system from members of the audience, and from the chairman (Norman Swan) in his summing up;
- Iodised salt confuses shoppers with its mixed message—iodine is an important issue, but carriers other than salt need to be used more widely.

We congratulate AWASH for their efforts to reduce the salt content of all processed foods.

Salt Skip News will continue to support the efforts of AWASH and will promote the wider production and consumption of low-salt foods.

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Salt Skip News will
continue to be distributed
in hard copy in The BP
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Try something new

by Liane Colwell

My suggestion this month is to eat more potassium-rich foods by subscribing to a box delivery service.

When choosing low salt foods remember that the other side of the electrolyte equation is potassium—the more the better. The best natural sources are fresh fruit, vegetables and nuts, especially when served raw.

The vegetable list includes English spinach, snow peas, watercress, Jerusalem artichokes (just starting now), avocados, herbs, cabbages and celeriac. Although potatoes are an excellent source of potassium they must be cooked, and have a high GI (Glycaemic Index).

Some nuts like **raw almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts and cashews** are outstanding for potassium content per 100 g—but watch the energy density.

I have a local, non-profit co-operative shop that puts value, seasonality and health at the top of its list. Each Friday I get 2 boxes of fruit and vegetables, full of surprises, delivered to my kitchen!

Aside from the convenience, the huge bonus is that the surprises encourage me to experiment, or research long-forgotten techniques. For example, they recently sent me some **kale** an often-overlooked vegetable from the *Brassicaceae* family—the **crucifers**—that is an outstanding source of antioxidants. The family includes radishes, broccoli, watercress, *bok choy*, rocket and cabbages.

I have been having fresh kale, hand-shredded in salads with raspberry vinegar, and then in the **soup** I make on Thursday nights from the vegetable remnants of the week.

If they send a vegetable I am not fond of, I may **grate** it and then toss it into a huge salad, or **give it away** to neighbours.

I always start lunch and dinner now with a big, crisp salad of at least 5 or 6 different vegetables. The second course is steamed or baked vegetables, with some protein such as flaked NAS sardines (King Oscar) or fresh-cooked chickpeas or beans. Very few canned legumes are low in salt, so watch the labels or cook your own. I embellish these protein and vegetable medleys with one of my latest salsas, made in the blender in seconds.

My favourite salsa ingredients include fresh herbs, raw nuts (preferably soaked overnight in water) extra virgin olive oil (EVOO), fresh or dried chillies and citrus juices, with water added to get sufficient volume in the blender or processor. With all that flavour I don't miss salt at all.

BP Monitor with Salt Skip News is published every 2 months, from February to December (6 issues a year).

Salt Skip Editorial Committee: Assoc Prof Michael Stowasser (Head, Hypertension Unit, University Dept. Medicine, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane), Sister Dianne Robson (Hypertension Nurse, Hypertension Unit, Greenslopes Private Hospital, Brisbane), Prof Tony Worsley (Senior Research Advisor, VicHealth), Prof Caryl Nowson (Nutrition & Ageing, Deakin University), Clare Rawcliffe (Cardiology Dietitian, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney), Dr Malcolm Riley (Honorary Fellow, Baker Heart Research Institute), Jane Brown (Home Economist, Salt Skip Program, Hobart). Text drafted (edited where other authors are named) by Liane Colwell, gastronomist, chef and writer. Guest editor Dr Trevor Beard. Printed by Snap Printing, Edward Street, Brisbane.