

Low-Salt “experts ” Cringing

by Dr. Bruce West

“Without adequate salt, nausea and anorexia result. And with radically reduced salt diets, nerves and muscles can suffer. There is poor growth, and bones do not develop properly. Digestion and metabolism suffer, and deficiencies of other minerals are common. In fact a low-salt diet is hard to follow, may actually be harmful, and has the potential of doing an enormous amount of harm, even to the heart and blood vessels.”

Wow, I wrote that 21 years ago! And about the only thing that has gotten the low salt “experts” more exasperated is what has become known as *The Best Evidence Study on Salt* published in JAMA. 2011;305:1777-1785 (Fatal and nonfatal outcomes, incidence of hypertension, and blood pressure changes in relation to urinary sodium excretion). Lead investigator is Jan Staessen, MD PhD, who heads the Studies Coordinating Centre, Laboratory of Hypertension, Division of Hypertension and Cardiovascular Rehabilitation, Department of Cardiovascular Diseases, at the University of Leuven, Belgium. To say that Dr. Staessen is a blood pressure and heart disease expert is an understatement. And his study has really gotten the low-salt “experts” in a tizzy.

Why? Because the low-salt folks have convinced the world that everyone needs to lower their salt intake. And that this lowered salt intake would lower blood pressure. And that the lowered blood pressure would automatically lower the risk of heart and blood vessel disease. This hypothesis has, over time, led to the “consensus of medical opinion” that lowered salt intake in the general population must be beneficial.

In contrast, Dr. Staessen and his investigators found something quite different. They found that only the systolic blood pressure (the top or first number) slowly rises over time with increased salt intake. But that this rise did not translate into a higher risk for either high blood pressure or heart and blood vessel disease! And in addition, they found, quite like my research, that lower salt intake was associated with higher heart and blood vessel disease mortality (death rates)! In fact the death rates got progressively worse as the salt intake got progressively lower!

The authors of the study concluded,

“The associations between systolic pressure (high blood pressure) and sodium excretion [salt intake] did not translate into less morbidity [deaths] or improved survival. On the contrary, low sodium excretion (salt intake) predicted higher cardiovascular mortality [deaths from heart and blood vessel disease]. Taken together, our current findings refute the estimates of computer models of lives saved and health care costs reduced with lower salt intake. They also do not support the current recommendations of a generalized and indiscriminate reduction of salt intake at the population level [for everyone]”.

Wow, if I staked my career and reputation on the low-salt hypothesis, I too would be worried. But these folks do not give up easily. They are already planning their “rightness” with statements like... the study was weak, it contributes little to our understanding of salt and disease, these results should not change our thinking about salt, the study was too small, the people in the study were too young, the samples were not taken correctly, and the classic from the Harvard School of Public Health Website, “take this study with a huge grain of salt, and then dispose of it properly.”

Salt, The Real Truth

If this study holds up, and Dr. Staessen has answered every single criticism of it, it turns out that my research was right from 3 decades ago, right up until now. The truth is: Most people eat too much salt. Most of this is in the forms of sodium chloride (table salt) and processed food. These make up for almost two thirds of all your salt intake. Simply never buy table salt again. Instead get Celtic Sea Salt® which is sodium chloride mixed with naturally occurring trace minerals like potassium, magnesium, and more.

Just switch to Celtic Sea Salt® and reduce or eliminate your intake of packaged and processed foods (which are laden with processed salt). Or to put it simply, eat a whole foods diet, and you will automatically be getting adequate amounts of the right kind of salt. Salt has little to do with high blood pressure. And the minor changes in blood pressure due to salt have little to nothing to do with heart and blood vessel disease. This was exquisitely proven in the study. Again, to help with blood pressure and heart disease, simply switch to Celtic Sea Salt® and a whole foods diet.

Low salt intake is detrimental to your health. Low salt and the wrong salt intake can lead to loss of insulin sensitivity. This is critical because this is the definition of type 2 diabetes, a true major factor in blood vessel inflammation, arteriosclerosis, and heart disease. Low salt can lead to insufficient digestive enzymes.

This is critical since most people suffer from insufficient stomach acid and digestive enzymes. This causes most acid indigestion, reflux, and GERD, and leads to poor absorption of vitamins and minerals. These definitely lead to heart and blood vessel disease. Low salt for kids can be extremely detrimental. This can lead to developmental problems with nerves, muscles and bones. Simply give your kids Celtic Sea Salt® and reduce their intake of processed and fast foods to keep them healthy.

Still Don't Know Who to Believe?

Actually Dr. Staessen has it right. But it doesn't even really matter. Just stop using table salt altogether. Replace it with Celtic Sea Salt®. And stop or reduce your intake of fast and processed foods and eat a whole-foods diet.

If you do these two things, it won't matter who is right because you will be right. You will lower your intake of excess sodium, but increase your intake of trace minerals. This prevents the problems associated with a low-salt diet while gaining all the benefits of reduced sodium.