

Registered Dietitians Speak Out on Sodium



A leader in food, nutrition and healthcare public relations, Pollock Communications conducted an online survey of more than 100 registered dietitians (RDs) to gain their point of view on sodium in the diet, public policy and the food industry. The questions addressed their perspective on sodium as a health concern, the adequacy of the current recommendations, the role of the food industry and the potential for public policy to help reduce sodium in the diet of Americans.

Below are highlights from the sodium survey of registered dietitians. Full survey results are available upon request.

Excess Sodium Poses Serious Health Risks

The vast majority of dietitians polled believe that sodium is a real health threat at the amounts normally consumed by Americans. However, those polled believe that the current public health guidelines for sodium (2,300 mg/day) among healthy individuals are adequate, and nearly 50 percent of the dietitians surveyed believe that they are likely to be achieved by making wise food choices. However, more than 60 percent of those polled believe that further reductions to 1,500 mg per day are unlikely to be achieved by Americans.

When trying to assess the threat of excess sodium, RDs were asked to compare sodium to other so-called “negative” nutrients in the diet, including trans fats, saturated fat, added sugars, high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and excess calories. The RDs ranked trans fats as the worst health threat followed by excess calories. Sodium ranked similarly to added sugars as a public health concern, with 62 percent of RDs saying excess sodium was as bad as added sugars. In addition, 45 percent of respondents said excess sodium was as bad as high fructose corn syrup, and more than 20 percent said sodium was worse than HFCS.

Sodium Solutions Rely on Food Industry

Dietitians strongly believe that the food industry needs to respond to the overwhelming data that suggests diets rich in sodium increase the risk for hypertension and stroke, and contribute to premature death. **Nearly 90 percent of RDs surveyed believe that the food industry is not doing enough to reduce sodium levels in their products.**

RDs believe that Americans can achieve sodium recommendations if the food industry reduces sodium in products. Few RDs suggest a ban or increased taxes on high-sodium foods, nor do they believe that the industry should create new lower-sodium options. Nearly half of respondents suggest widespread reductions in sodium in available foods as the primary solution.

However, there is growing concern that the government will need to provide some pressure to see swifter changes in the food industry. **More than half (54 percent) of RDs surveyed want to see the government take some type of action to encourage manufacturers to make sodium reductions in their products.**



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Consumer Guidance

When asked about what guidance RDs give to consumers about sodium, many say they recommend avoiding processed foods. This strategy for sodium reduction is the most effective, since nearly 77 percent of current sodium intake comes from processed foods.

Other advice from RDs includes reading labels, eating smaller portions and taking steps to avoid using the salt shaker at home. However, little sodium is added during cooking or at the table, so the biggest payoff is seen by eating fewer processed foods. These types of avoidance guidelines are expected to continue until the food industry does product reformulations to lower sodium levels in food products.

Brand Recognition

When asked about which brands RDs feel are doing a good job helping consumers meet sodium guidelines, the most frequently cited was Campbell's, with 21 percent mentioning the soup maker. More than 10 percent said Progresso, and 9.5 percent of respondents recognized Healthy Choice.

This is not surprising, as RDs see news around Campbell's and their sodium reductions. Plus, soup is often targeted as one of the saltiest foods in the food supply and a category that has much scrutiny around the sodium levels of its products.

