

The Salt Debate – More Salacious than Salubrious

(Abstract from October 2011 Dinner Meeting)

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Over the last two decades, the understanding of salt reduction as a means to reduce blood pressure has evolved from a recommendation for voluntary dietary restriction for individuals at risk to a point where the entire population is in the process of having its food choices narrowed to products engineered for reduced sodium intake in accordance with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines.

Dietary salt reduction as the primary lifestyle strategy to reduce blood pressure has been aggressively promoted by activist groups such as the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and World of Action on Salt and Health (WASH), as well as the CDC, WHO, the IOM and more recently, the FDA. Even the White House has weighed in by placing pressure on many influential food industry stakeholders to reduce the salt content of their foods. Wal-Mart, one of the country's largest food retailers has publicly indicated that it will require their suppliers to dramatically reduce the salt content of their food products. This type of pressure may effectively sidestep the normal regulatory process and the need to provide the scientific justification for such regulations.

As this sodium reduction strategy will be charting new territory, the entire population will, in effect, be placed in a dietary intervention trial to demonstrate the impact of low sodium intakes. Indeed, the IOM Committee that drafted the Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intake in the United States cautioned that at all stages of their stepwise sodium reduction strategy, efforts to analyze any unintended consequences should be carried out.

But what do we really know about the impact of salt reduction on human health and why are the available studies so inconsistent and controversial? Mort Satin will be reviewing all the evidence 'for' and 'against' salt reduction as well as the dynamics and characters involved in the salt/health debate at the October dinner meeting.