Why is high salt intake bad for your health?

Consumption of salt more than 5 grams per day increases blood pressure and puts people at greater risk of heart disease and stroke. It is ranked as a leading risk factor for high blood pressure, globally. Over 4.1 million annual deaths globally are linked to excess intake of salt.

Beware of sodium in your food

Consuming excess amount of salt can raise blood pressure at any age. Sodium is the chemical element found in salt that is responsible for the elevation of blood pressure. Recommended daily limits – less than 5 grams of salt intake or less than 2 grams (2,000 mg) of sodium intake.

High blood pressure – a silent killer

High blood pressure is a long-term medical condition in which the blood pressure is persistently elevated. High blood pressure is a major risk factor leading to deaths due to heart disease and stroke.

Heart disease and stroke claim lives at a younger age

Heart disease and stroke are among leading causes of death in the South-East Asia Region. In Myanmar, one in every four deaths is estimated to be due to heart disease and stroke, often not yet 70 years.

Costs of treating heart disease & stroke are high

Treatment cost of heart disease and stroke are commonly very high. They usually need long-term treatment and result in high out-of-pocket expenditure to families, which can push many households into catastrophic health expenditure and impoverishment.

Reducing salt intake is one of the most cost-effective measures to improve population health outcomes.

Love your heart – reduce salt & sodium intake

WHO recommends to reduce salt intake to less than 5 grams per day.

Coronavirus disease (Covid19) update

- As at 17 August 2020, 216 countries or territories reported 21,516,760 cases and 766,663 deaths from Covid19. There are currently several epicentres in the world, notably in the Americas and in South Asia.
- In Myanmar, 376 confirmed cases have been detected as at 17 August 2020, and 6 deaths.
- Common symptoms of Covid19 are fever, tiredness, dry cough, loss of taste, loss of smell, difficulty breathing.
- Simple preventive measures have proven very effective.
- Our newsletter special of 4 April 2020 has further details https://bit.ly/2zRDMfm
- How to wear your fabric mask safely is available in Myanmar language at https://bit.ly/3gvKesw

High blood pressure, salt intake & Covid19

Patients with raised blood pressure have a two-fold increased risk of dying from the Covid19 compared to patients without high blood pressure. People with uncontrolled high blood pressure were at even greater risk of developing complications of Covid19. Reduce use of salt and food high in sodium helps to control blood pressure.

Food preparation & consumption while you stay at home

When preparing to stay at home, make sure to have vegetables, fruits, pulses, rice that can be stored. For example, pumpkin, beans, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, chayote, roots, guava, banana. Vegetables and fruits are rich in potassium and they help the body balance sodium. During an outbreak, availability of fresh foods may be less. Hence it could become necessary to rely on packed, processed foods. Many of such foods contain high levels of salt and sodium. Therefore, to balance your salt intake, prioritize food with reduced or no added salt - and eat food rich in potassium.

editorial date 18 August 2020
Salt consumption in Myanmar

Most people consume too much salt—on average 9–12 grams per day, or around twice the recommended maximum intake. Recent surveys (MMFCS 2018)* show high consumption of salt in Myanmar, young adults consume nearly double the recommended level of salt. Further, women consume more salt than men.

About 46% of the students aged 13–17 years tend to eat junk food high in salt on 2 or more days a week.

Only 18.2% of students appear to eat fruits and vegetables two or more times per day.

Why reducing salt intake helps us stay healthy

Robust scientific evidence shows that reducing salt and sodium intake reduces blood pressure and could prevent many early deaths from heart disease and stroke. A global population study** provided further evidence: a reduction in blood pressure by 20mmHg at community level can reduces deaths due to heart disease & stroke by 50% among economically active adults.

Salt reduction prevents heart disease and stroke.

“One teaspoon of salt for a day”

Salt consumption (g/day) by age group in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>WHO Cut off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;=45</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* source: Myanmar micronutrient & food consumption survey (MMFCS) 2020 (accessment period 2017-2018)


how to reduce consumption of salt and prevent ill health

what you can do

- identify & reduce consumption of food high in salt and sodium
- avoid snacks high in salt and sodium, e.g. chips,
- reduce quantity of salt added during cooking
- remove table salt from dining table
- reduce intake of highly processed foods; they are high in salt and sodim.
- increase consumption of fruits and vegetables that are high in potassium
- replace salt with natural herbs and spices during cooking
- compare labels when buying food, choose products with less salt and less sodium

Please note - some foods that are high in salt don’t taste very salty e.g. sauces. Since they are mixed with other ingredients like sugars that mask the taste. Therefore, it is important the practice of reading food labels to find out sodium levels.

what communities can do

- create awareness among communities on the risks of high salt intake and high blood pressure
- aim for behaviour change to reduce salt intake, including in cooking and baking
- impart health literacy to make healthy choices -- and build skills to interpret food labels
- improve dietary diversity, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption
- provide a supportive environment for children and young adults to adopt a low sodium diet early
- work as a community to achieve changes
- food manufacturers to reformulate composition of food products to reduce the salt content
- businesses to foster responsible marketing promoting healthy food choices.
WHO Myanmar newsletter, issue 63, volume 17

Coronavirus Disease (Covid19) updates

30 July 2020 marked six months since WHO declared Covid19 as a public health emergency of international concern.

WHO Director General convened the 4th meeting of the Emergency Committee associated with the International Health Regulations IHR on 31 July 2020.

Based on the advice of the IHR emergency committee, WHO Director General declared that the outbreak of Covid19 continues to constitute a public health emergency of international concern.

Further advice included the need for continuing Covid19 response over the long term, indicating the centrality of health in any recovery. IHR statement is available in full at https://bit.ly/2PsTYZ5


Since January 2020, WHO published more than 100 technical documents, guiding the entire spectrum of Covid19 management. All WHO technical documents are at https://bit.ly/3iqysAH

Covid19 & other health issues

WHO Regional Director for South East Asia convened a virtual meeting of SEAR Ministers of Health 6 Aug 2020, charting ways to accelerate resumption of essential health services as an integral part of the pandemic response.

World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2020, UNICEF and WHO encourage countries to continue to protect and promote breastfeeding. Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of a baby’s life is highly recommended. This also applies to mothers with suspected or confirmed Covid19.

Updates on transmission of Covid19

Transmission of Covid19 can occur through contact with infected secretions, for example respiratory droplets, saliva, running nose. When an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks or sings, such secretions are expelled.

Regarding the possibility of airborne transmission, Covid19 transmission in crowded, closed, poorly ventilated settings cannot be ruled out. At the same time, more evidence is needed. Further information is available at https://bit.ly/2XwxEZI

Transmission of Covid19 is primarily occurring when infected people have symptoms. Transmission can also occur just before they develop symptoms. More research is needed to ascertain whether someone who never develops symptoms can also pass the virus to others.

Scientific brief on transmission of Covid19 is available at https://bit.ly/3iD4JK. This brief discusses current evidence, as at 9 July 2020, and the implications for infection prevention precautions.

7 simple steps to protect yourself and others from Covid19

How to break the chains of transmission


WHO published a manifesto, containing six steps for a green recovery from Covid19. It aims to:

1) cherish and protect the source of all human health, the natural world
2) invest in vital, live-saving services, access to water and sanitation, clean energy in healthcare facilities
3) quickly transition to clean, renewable sources of energy
4) switch to healthy and sustainable food systems
5) green all our towns and cities to become healthy
6) shift from an economy driven by profit and pollution to an economy driven by fairness and wellbeing.

We know what we need to do. We have the tools to do it. Let us work together now to create a healthier and greener world.


WHO manifesto for a healthy recovery from Covid19

Important dates

Regional Director WHO South-East Asia Region & SEAR Health ministers discussed pandemic response & basic health services
6 August 2020
Nutrition Promotion Month
August 2020

73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia, Thailand (virtual session)
9-10 September 2020

World Patient Safety Day
17 September 2020

75th United Nations Day UN75
World Polio Day
24 October 2020
World antibiotic awareness week
18-24 November 2020
World AIDS Day
1 December 2020

World Health Organization - Myanmar
Tel: (95-1) 7534300/307, 7538620 - 621, 7538474 - 476  GPN Ext. 24200
Fax: (95-1) 7538233, 7538435   Email: semmr@who.int
Website: http://www.who.int/myanmar