

SaltGuru Video Transcript

Episode: 4 – National Salt Reduction Initiative

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▶ Hi, my name is Mort Satin and I am the Salt Guru. It is the start of the New Year and from what we have seen in the press, 2010 promises to be a busy year for salt.

On January 11, [Mayor Bloomberg of New York announced new salt reduction targets](#) for specific foods under the city's so-called "National Salt Reduction Initiative." This announcement was timed to coincide with a series of articles published in a number of journals, including the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) and the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#). The way it all played out in the media would almost lead one to believe that the initiative was part of a well-orchestrated activist campaign.

But, if the health of consumers is at stake, surely the medical evidence itself would obviate the need for such an extraordinary effort. The problem is that in the cold dispassionate view of objective science...the evidence does not support a population-wide reduction in salt. And it is because the evidence does not exist that an international group of anti-salt advocates have joined forces to push their agenda through despite this lack of evidence.

Sounds strange, doesn't it? The Cold War is long over and even the James Bond movies no longer feature international conspiracies bent on world domination. Yet, here I am, referring to an international coordinated effort specifically focused on forcing through a reduction in salt intakes, despite the fact that the medical evidence supporting such an action is either very weak or nonexistent.

Let's look at this issue a bit more carefully. It has been a little more than a decade since the well-known science journalist Gary Taubes wrote the article "[The Political Science of Salt](#)" in the [August 18, 1998 edition of the journal Science](#). In that article, for which he received the [Science in Society Journalism Award from the National Association of Science Writers](#), Taubes highlighted the lack of legitimate, evidence-based medical science supporting the population-wide reduction in salt. He also reported the lengths to which the anti-salt advocates have gone to make their case in the absence of this scientific evidence.

Since that paper was published, even more evidence has been published, making clear that there is very little or no benefit to population-wide salt reduction. In fact, the most recent white paper, completed in July of 2009, was a large meta-review carried out by the [Institute for Quality and](#)

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[Efficiency in Healthcare](#), the body whose function is to provide health and medical policy advice to the German Ministry of Health.

There have also been papers published in support of salt reduction, but they are all focused upon the singular issue of blood pressure. These studies indicate that when we make major reductions in salt intake, let's say by reducing salt by 1/2 to 2/3 of current consumption, salt-sensitive people, and salt-sensitive people only, may see a small reduction in blood pressure. As an example, if you have a systolic blood pressure of 160 mm Hg, it may go down to 155 or 156. They then make a giant leap of faith and go on to speculate that this will save hundreds of thousands of lives per year - but have no real evidence to back this contention up. In fact [cardiovascular death rates have been dropping dramatically for the past thirty years](#) - without any reduction in salt something never mentioned in these publications.

Another strange thing is that when you look at the authors of these papers, it is clear that most of them are listed as members of an organization called WASH - [World Action on Salt and Health](#) - a British-based international advocacy group specifically devoted to worldwide salt reduction. You can see on their web page that all members have an interest in reducing salt intake in their individual countries.

Hang on a moment - scientists are no different than anyone else. Those who scientists openly declare that they have an interest in reducing salt may be compromised when they are doing research on that issue, won't they? Won't they be more prone to support studies linking salt to poor health? Of course they will, and that is the very reason why most medical journals ask their authors to declare any conflicting interests so that those reading and evaluating the research can be forewarned of a possible bias in the results. I'm with the Salt Institute, so no matter what I say, people will scrutinize my words very carefully because they think I have a pre-conceived view of the issue. Yet, none of the authors of salt reduction papers who are listed as members of the advocacy group WASH has ever declared their association in the organization as a conflicting interest when authoring papers that we are led to believe are based on fully objective science.

Look, before science came along, everyone believed the ancient Greek philosophers who said that life miraculously came out of the air - they called it [spontaneous generation](#). For almost 2,000 years everyone fervently believed this. Why? Because the renowned Greek philosophers said it, that's why. Then, along came Francis Bacon and said, "Hang on a minute - prove it! Do an experiment to prove that spontaneous generation exists or doesn't exist." Well, it took some time but Louis Pasteur using objective

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science, eventually proved it was all a hoax. A hoax perpetrated on an unsuspecting public simply by invoking the name of a famous institution - the Greek philosophers. When it comes to salt and health, isn't it time we say, "Hang on a minute - prove it!" rather than listening to the speculations of activists - no matter who they are or how good their intentions may be

Conclusions on all matters as important as public health must be based upon objectively derived evidence, not someone's opinion. That's what science is all about.

So we are left with one body of evidence, much of it prepared by listed members of an anti-salt advocacy group, and focused upon the impact of salt on the blood pressure of a limited number of salt-sensitive people and another body of evidence that disputes that salt reduction will have any positive impact on population health outcomes. We have two large meta-analyses, which are reviews of all other papers, carried out by institutes long trusted in the field of evidence-based medicine - that is, the previously mentioned [German group](#) and the [Cochrane Collaboration](#) of the UK - both came to the conclusion that salt reduction will not have any significant impact on population health outcomes. And we have one large meta-review prepared by [two British members of WASH](#) that stated salt reduction was warranted. Conflicting results, but no conflicting interests admitted to by members of WASH

Despite the large body of evidence cautioning against population-wide salt reduction, Mayor Bloomberg announced New York City's proposed salt reduction targets on January 11, 2010. One of the most active proponents behind this initiative is Dr. Sonja Angell of the NYC Cardiovascular Disease Prevention and Control Program. Validating Taubes' contention that there is more politics than science behind the anti-salt lobby is the [editorial Angell wrote in last week's edition of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#), which was closely timed to coincide with the publication of the New York City targets. In her editorial, Dr. Angell praises a survey of Australian foods published in the same edition of the journal. [The study she referred to was authored by three members of the Australian Division of WASH](#). Their survey differed from other surveys by highlighting the salt content of specifically-branded products for the sole purpose of coercing food companies into formulating their foods in compliance with the WASH salt reduction agenda or risk being "named and shamed" in public. Dr. Angell revealed the intended use of such a database and the ultimate motivation behind much of the salt reduction agenda: activist control of the food industry. She went on to state, and I quote, "Such information is relevant because food manufacturing is increasingly dominated by limited number of corporations..." indeed, she went further on to say that such a system has

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value far beyond sodium and can be used to monitor (and presumably control) all other nutrients in foods.

In other words, the salt reduction initiatives are not simply about salt, but appear to be the first step in the global program for single-issue advocates to control the normal market relationship between producers and consumers through activist government policy. Food companies will no longer produce products with consumers as their prime focus and consumer acceptability as their priority, but would first have to conform to the whims of activists who are not particularly fastidious when it comes to standards of scientific evidence. This unjustified attempt to curtail freedom of choice is an egregious example of Big Brotherhood, and the Mayor of New York appears to have been hoodwinked into serving as its chief spokesperson.

In the absence of a solid scientific basis to justify their initiative, WASH, a global confederacy of anti-salt advocates (which, by the way, includes a Chairperson of the American [Dietary Guidelines Advisory Group](#)) has contrived to manipulate the diet of consumers and remove their freedom of choice. The sad part is that the food industry has lamely gone along with them, thinking that these advocates might be satisfied with controlling food's salt content and nothing else. It is a prime example of letting the fox into the hen house. Next on the advocates' agenda will be sugar, starch, protein, fat, etc., until all products, all around the world are the same – we will be eating feed - not food, feed conforming to a biased vision which is devoid of any clinical benefit to consumers. Such a situation would be a disaster for the world's small business owners who exist primarily on the basis of the uniqueness of their products.

The science supporting salt reduction is very weak, ignoring net population health outcomes and focusing only on salt-sensitive hypertension among a limited number of the population who do not consume a balanced diet. All review analyses conducted by objective evidence-based medical institutions not connected to WASH have come to the conclusion that population-wide salt reduction is unwarranted. Yet, the coordinated efforts of an international cabal of anti-salt advocates have effectively hijacked and controlled this issue in order to achieve an anti-free enterprise, anti-consumer-choice agenda that will be of benefit to no one.

This is Mort Satin, your SaltGuru saying bye-bye until next time. ◀

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