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Episode: 7 – The IOM “Strategies” Report

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Hi, I’m Mort Satin and I’m the SaltGuru.

Tuesday, April 20 2010 – a date which will live in nutritional infamy! The health and welfare of the population of United States of America was, not so suddenly, but nevertheless deliberately, attacked by the combined forces of anti-salt activists, whose goal was to ignore the full body of existing scientific evidence on salt and health and force through measures which may ultimately wreak havoc upon our food system and our dietary well-being.

Substituting bogus claims of the imminent deaths of hundreds of thousands of citizens from heart disease and stroke resulting from current levels of salt consumption, the Institute of Medicine release of its report, “Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intake in the United States” completely ignored the actual facts that our cardiovascular health and stroke status has never been better than it is today!!

Just look at the data from the [National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) . Now this is a log-scale chart, not a linear chart, so the results don’t appear nearly as dramatic as they actually are. Look at the brown line for stroke. Stroke deaths have gone from 250 per 100,000 population down to 70 or so. If my calculations are correct, that’s a drop of more than 70%! Incredible, the actual CDC data shows more than a 70% drop in stroke death rates. That’s unbelievable. What about heart disease?? Let’s take a look at the bright red line of heart disease. It appears to have gone from almost 800 per 100,000 population down to 240. That’s also a 70% drop!!

But, wait a minute! Our salt consumption hasn’t dropped. We’re eating the same or just slightly more salt than we did in 1950, yet, according to the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics, our heart disease and stroke death rates have plummeted by 70%!

That data notwithstanding, the Center for Science in the Public Interest claims that salt is responsible for [hundreds of thousands of death from stroke and heart disease each year](#). Now, admittedly, they never refer to any hard data, such as that published by the National Center for Health Statistics, so where do they get their figures from?

Looking back through the medical literature, I found an article entitled, [“Reducing the Public Health Burden From Elevated Blood Pressure Levels in](#)

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[the United States by Lowering Intake of Dietary Sodium](#),” written by Drs. Havas, Roccella and Lenfant in the January 2004 edition of the American Journal of Public Health. In this article, which as you can see, is a Commentary rather than a description of actual experimental data, the authors estimated that salt reduction would save 150,000 lives per year. They made no reference at all to clinical studies showing deaths due to specific levels of salt consumption at all. More importantly, they made no reference whatsoever to the dramatic drop in cardiovascular disease and stroke death rates that they surely must have known about – after all, they were supposed to be objective experts, weren’t they?

Searching through the internet, I came across an interesting website for [World Action on Salt and Health](#) or simply WASH. This is a well-funded activist group whose singular aim is, as you can see, to “bring about a reduction in salt intake throughout the world by reducing the amount of salt in processed foods as well as salt added to cooking, and at the table.” An activist advocacy group dedicated to reducing salt around the world. They are proud of their members and have them all listed on their website.

Among the individuals listed as members, it’s no particular surprise to see the staff of another activist group, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, but also listed are Drs. Havas, Roccella and Lenfant, the authors who came up with their estimate of the 150,000 lives to be lost if we continue to eat salt the way we do. Is it possible that their dedication to universal salt reduction may have influenced their thinking and their estimate? Might that be a reason to ignore the actual data on the reduction in heart disease and stroke death rates published by the CDC?

So where does the IOM report leave us? I’ll tell you where.

It leaves us more confused than ever.

It is not the first time that the eminent medical institutions in this country have led us astray. Does anyone remember the recommendation for women to take hormone replacement therapy? As you can see, that recommendation was based on limited research and opinion rather than scientific evidence. Does anyone remember the medical authorities crying out that egg consumption was going lead to a quick and horrible death from clogged arteries? Now that has all been reversed and the more eggs you eat, the better. Should women take mammograms frequently or should they refrain. Should men take their PSAs every year or does it lead to unnecessary treatment? That’s what I mean when I say we are more confused than ever.

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We depend on our great institutions for thoughtful, in-depth analysis and recommendations that are based on a thorough and objective evaluation of the scientific evidence. That's why we pay taxes to support them. We don't pay them to act like amateur activists parading around under the umbrella of institutional credibility. How can they get it wrong so often?

How come? Because they misunderstand their mission. When the data is not there, they should demand a clinical trial to fill in all the blanks, not treat the public as guinea pigs. The IOM report "Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intakes " makes it very clear –the IOM fully intends to put the entire population of the United States into the largest clinical trial ever carried out in history, without the knowledge or consent of the people. Clearly stated in their report is the central element of their strategy - to gradually lower salt intake in stages and at every stage check if this has caused any unintended negative consequences for the population. Unbelievable, isn't that what a clinical trial is supposed to do??

In fact, I'm a bit surprised at the media. With very few exceptions they have accepted the IOM's approach without question seeming having made the complete transition from watchdogs to lapdogs in this matter.

H.L. Mencken's once said, "A certain section of medical opinion has succumbed to a messianic delusion. They conceive it to be their duty to force their advice upon everyone, especially those who don't want it. The impulse behind it is not altruism, but a mere yearning to run things." Combine that with poor, inconclusive data and you have a recipe for disaster.

Salt is an essential nutrient that has stood the test of time. Our biology is the best indicator of how much we should consume and the data from the National Center for Health Statistics bears out how well we are doing health wise. On top of that, our life expectancy has never been greater. That's right, The cold hard facts make it clear that we are living longer than ever before in history.

Let's not start reversing this trend.

This is the SaltGuru saying goodbye for now.

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