

Labelling Salt and Food Choice: Why Less is More

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Abstract

While it is clear that reducing sodium intake would ameliorate the risk of cardiovascular disease, much less is known about how to promote choice of lower salt products. Although traditional labelling approaches assume consumers process information centrally, research evidence suggests peripheral processing is more common, and concludes labels using heuristics have more influence than those presenting detailed information. An on-line discrete choice experiment compared 600 hypertensive and 300 normo-tensive respondents' reactions to "traffic light" and "percent daily intake" labels". "Traffic light" labels enhanced both groups' ability to discriminate between high salt and low salt products, and reduced demand for products with higher salt content. However, other measures, including interventions to decrease supply of sodium in processed foods and improve consumers' knowledge are required to reduce the considerable morbidity and mortality caused by high sodium intake.