SALT CONSUMPTION IN INDIA

NEWS: According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and its National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE), **Excessive salt intake** is emerging as a **major health risk** in India, contributing to rising rates of **hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and kidney disorders.**

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Recommended Salt and Sodium Intake

- **WHO Salt Intake Guidelines**:
  The **World Health Organization (WHO)** recommends that adults consume **less than 5 grams of salt per person per day** to reduce the risk of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

- **WHO Sodium Intake Target**:
  Sodium consumption should be **below 2 grams per day**, as excess intake is linked to serious health risks, especially elevated blood pressure and heart conditions.

Salt Consumption in India

- **Urban vs Rural Consumption Patterns**:
  - In **urban India**, the **average daily salt intake** is **approximately 9.2 grams**, which is nearly **double** the WHO recommended limit.
  - In **rural India**, the average salt intake stands at **5.6 grams per day**, still **exceeding** the WHO guidelines.

- **National Concern**:
  These figures suggest a **widespread overconsumption of salt** across both urban and rural populations, contributing to rising rates of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases in India.

Global Sodium Burden

- **Health Impact**:
  An estimated **1.9 million deaths globally each year** are directly attributable to **excessive sodium consumption**.
  Sodium-driven hypertension is a key risk factor for **stroke, heart failure, and kidney disease**.

- **Global Average (2019)**:
  The **global average sodium intake** was recorded at **4.3 grams/day**, which is **more than double** the recommended limit by WHO, indicating a global health concern.

Indian Government Initiatives

- **FSSAI's 'Eat Right India' Movement**:
  The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** launched this initiative to **promote healthy and safe eating habits** among the Indian population.

- **'Aaj Se Thoda Kam' Campaign**:
  A focused **social media campaign** urging citizens to **reduce salt consumption**, using the slogan "Aaj Se Thoda Kam" (From today, a little less).

- **Persistent High Intake**:
  Despite these efforts, **average daily sodium intake** in India remains **around 11 grams**, highlighting the **gap between awareness and actual dietary change**.

About the Salt Reduction Study

- **Project Implementation**:
  Conducted by the **ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology (ICMR-NIE)** with support from the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**.
  Currently being implemented in **Punjab and Telangana**.
- **Study Duration and Objectives**:
  - The study spans **three years**.
  - Aims to evaluate the **effectiveness of structured salt-reduction counselling** delivered through **Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)**.

Why Limiting Salt Intake Is Critical

- **Cardiovascular Burden**:
  Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are a **leading cause of death in India**, accounting for **28.1% of total deaths**.
- **Rising Deaths Due to Hypertension**:
  - In **1990**, high salt intake contributed to **0.78 million deaths**.
  - By **2016**, this number rose to **1.6 million**, showing a **doubling of mortality** in 26 years.
- **Recent Trends**:
  In **2020**, **32.1% of all certified deaths** were due to **circulatory system diseases**, with **hypertension being a key contributing factor**.
- **Economic Implications**:
  The **World Economic Forum** estimates a projected loss of **over $2 trillion for India between 2012 and 2030** due to productivity and health costs associated with CVDs.

Low-Sodium Salt Substitutes (LSSS)

- **What Are LSSS?**
  LSSS are salts where **a portion of sodium chloride (NaCl)** is replaced with other minerals like **potassium chloride (KCl)** or **magnesium salts**, providing a similar taste with **reduced sodium content**.
- **Health Benefits**:
  These substitutes **help reduce overall sodium intake** and also provide **potassium**, which is known to have **blood pressure-lowering properties**.

- **Effectiveness**:
  Research has shown that use of LSSS can lead to an **average reduction in blood pressure of 7 mmHg (systolic) and 4 mmHg (diastolic)**.
- **Public Health Strategy**:
  LSSS are increasingly seen as a **practical and cost-effective intervention** to manage hypertension and reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases in both **developed and developing nations**.

Why Salt Consumption Needs Regulation

- **Essential Role of Salt**:
  Salt is vital for **maintaining fluid balance, transmitting nerve impulses**, and **enabling muscle contractions**. It is an **essential micronutrient** for the human body.
- **Dangers of Excess**:
  Overconsumption can lead to **hypertension**, increased risk of **heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure**, particularly when combined with **sedentary lifestyles and poor dietary habits**.
- **Moderation Is Key**:
  Striking a **balance between adequate and excessive intake** is crucial for **preventing non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** and promoting long-term well-being.

About ICMR and ICMR-NIE

- **ICMR – Apex Biomedical Research Body**:
  The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** operates under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, and is the **premier institution for medical research and policy guidance** in India.
- **ICMR-NIE (Established 1999)**:
  The **National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE)**, based in Chennai, is a key institute under ICMR, specializing in **epidemiological surveillance, public health research**, and **population-level interventions**.

Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/one-pinch-at-a-time-icmr-flags-high-salt-intake-in-india-as-major-health-risk-urban-consumption-nearly-double-who-limit/articleshow/122417784.cms