GENEVA: On World Heart Day, held 29 September, the **World Health Organization** (WHO) is calling on countries to take action on the overuse of salt by implementing **WHO's sodium reduction recommendations** to cut the number of people experiencing heart disease and stroke, and, in turn, save lives.

Noncommunicable diseases, including heart disease and stroke, are the leading causes of premature death in the 21st century. The World Health Organization is supporting governments to implement the Global action plan to reduce noncommunicable diseases that comprises nine global targets, including one to reduce global salt intake by a relative 30% by 2025.

"If the target to reduce salt by 30% globally by 2025 is achieved, millions of lives can be saved from heart disease, stroke and related conditions," says Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

The main source of sodium in our diet is salt. It can come from sodium glutamate and sodium chloride, and is used as a condiment in many parts of the world. In many countries, 80% of salt intake comes from processed foods such as bread, cheese, bottled sauces, cured meats and ready-made meals.

Consuming too much salt can lead (or contribute) to hypertension, or high blood pressure, and greatly increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

On average, people consume around 10 grams of salt per day. This is around double WHO's recommended level from all sources, including processed foods, ready-made meals and food prepared at home (less than 5 grams or under one teaspoon per day). WHO recommends that children aged 2 to 15 years consume even less salt than this, adjusted to their energy requirements for growth.

"Salt is in almost everything we eat, either because high levels of salt are found in most processed and prepared foods, or because we are adding salt when we prepare food at home," adds Dr Chestnov.

Dr Chestnov said that reducing salt intake is one of the most effective ways for countries to improve population health, and urged the food industry to work closely with WHO and national governments to incrementally reduce the level of salt in food products.

WHO's evidence-based strategies to reduce salt consumption include:

- regulations and policies to ensure that food manufacturers and retailers reduce the levels of salt in food and beverage products;
- agreements with the industry to ensure that manufacturers and retailers make healthy food (with low salt) available and affordable;
- fostering healthy eating environments (that promote salt reduction) in public places such as schools, hospitals, workplaces and public institutions;
- ensuring clear food labelling so consumers can easily understand the level of salt in products;
- implementing WHO's recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

Strategies for individuals and families to reduce salt intake include:

- reading food labels when buying processed food to check salt levels;
- asking for products with less salt when buying prepared food;
- removing salt dispensers and bottled sauces from dining tables;
- limiting the amount of salt added in cooking to a total maximum amount a fifth of a teaspoon over the course of a day;
- limiting frequent consumption of high salt products;
- guiding children's taste buds through a diet of mostly unprocessed foods without adding salt.

Editors note on iodized salt:

In countries where iodine deficiency needs to be addressed, all salts should be iodized. Even consuming small amounts of adequately iodized salt will still provide the additional health benefits associated with iodine, ensuring proper cognitive development in children.

Related links:

- **Salt reduction fact sheet: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs393/en/**
- **WHO guideline on sodium intake for adults and children: http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sodium_intake/en/**
- **WHO Global Action Plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable**

diseases 2013-2020: http://www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-action-plan/en/

- **World Heart Day**