Government policies that ban **industrial trans fats**, reduce **saturated fats** and **salt** in food, and encourage more fruit and vegetable consumption could cut **deaths** from **cardiovascular disease** by 20%. A study published in the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* shows that healthier **food policies**, similar to those already introduced in some countries, could save up to 30 000 lives each year in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Death rates from cardiovascular disease are twice as high among people who eat diets high in saturated fat, trans fats, calories and salt such as processed food, junk food or canned soups . The study estimates the lives that could be saved from cardiovascular disease in the United Kingdom if stricter policies and initiatives were introduced to encourage healthier eating.

For example, the study predicts that a ban on industrial trans fats in the United Kingdom could save almost 5000 lives each year. A policy that reduced daily salt intake from 8.6g to 5.6g per day could save almost 7000 lives while an additional three portions of fruit and vegetables eaten daily could prevent 7400 deaths.

While individuals can make choices to improve their diet, the study authors say that stricter government policies can have a rapid and significant effect on the health of entire populations. Countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, that have introduced healthier food policies have seen significant reductions in cardiovascular deaths as well as other health benefits including reducing diabetes and some cancers.

Simon Capewell, professor of clinical epidemiology at the University of Liverpool and one of the authors of the research, says, “Using the legislation and taxation which has already been successful in Europe, new UK government policies could prevent between 10 000 and 30 000 deaths every year.

“Both adults and children deserve better protection from the harmful effects of cheap junk food and sugary drinks,” Capewell adds. “A simple first step could be to eliminate industrial trans fats, as done successfully in Denmark and elsewhere.”

“This study reaffirms how strong nutrition policies could rapidly lead to substantial public health benefits,” says Francesco Branca, director of the Nutrition for Health and Development Department at WHO. “It provides support to the target of a 25% reduction of mortality from noncommunicable diseases by the year 2025, recently approved by the World Health Assembly.”

According to Branca, most of the 14 million people aged between 30 and 69 years who die from noncommunicable diseases each year could be saved by cost-effective interventions.