

## Best Practice: National Salt Reduction Initiative

REPORT UPDATED: JANUARY 15, 2014

CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREAS: PUBLIC HEALTH

### BEST PRACTICE

**The National Salt Reduction Initiative (NSRI)**, led by New York City, is a coalition of over 90 local and state health authorities and national health organizations. The NSRI has set gradual sodium reduction targets for packaged and restaurant food and encourages companies to voluntarily meet these targets. Twenty-eight national food companies have committed to NSRI targets since April 2010. The NSRI maintains comprehensive databases on packaged food and restaurant food to monitor progress toward its objectives.

### ISSUE

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in New York City and the United States. The average American consumes about 3,300 mg of sodium per day, well above the recommended limit of 2,300 mg per day for the general population. Excess sodium intake can cause high blood pressure and place millions at risk of heart attack and stroke. Only 11% of dietary sodium comes from our own salt shakers; nearly 80% is added to food before it is sold. Reducing sodium intake can save tens of thousands of lives and billions of dollars in annual health care costs.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The NSRI aims to reduce sodium intake in the United States by 20% through voluntary corporate commitments to lowering sodium in packaged and restaurant foods by 25% over five years. To that end, the NSRI developed 2012 and 2014 sodium reduction targets for 62 packaged food categories and 25 restaurant food categories.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The NSRI was launched in October 2008. Modeled on the United Kingdom's Salt Reduction Campaign, the NSRI set voluntary salt reduction targets by individual food category for packaged and restaurant foods. In 2009, the NSRI conducted more than 100 meetings with manufacturers, restaurant chains, trade associations and related organizations to discuss industry feedback on the proposed targets. Following these consultations, the targets were publicly released for industry technical comment in early January 2010. Final 2012 and 2014 targets were announced in April 2010 for 62 packaged food categories and 25 restaurant categories. The voluntary targets are intended to be substantive, gradual and measurable.

The NSRI created two unique databases to support the initiative, one specific to packaged food and a second tailored to restaurant food. To create the packaged food database, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene purchased sales data from the Nielsen Company and merged it with publicly-available nutrition data. The NSRI packaged food database includes the top 80% of products (ranked by sales) in each food category and allows for the calculation of sales-weighted mean sodium by both company and category. The restaurant food database merges publicly-available nutrition data for the top 50 quick-service restaurants, based on sales, with NPD Crest market share data. Both databases were built in 2009 to inform target setting and will be updated over time to assess changes in sodium levels in the U.S. food supply.

To date, 28 national packaged food companies, supermarkets and restaurant chains have committed to reduce sodium in their products according to the NSRI framework. These companies include Campbell Soup Company, Subway, Kraft and Delhaize America (the owner of Food Lion and Hannaford). The vast majority of companies that committed to NSRI 2012 targets met their pledge.

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The NSRI partnership has grown rapidly since the initiative launched and now includes more than 90 local and state health departments and national health organizations, including the American Heart Association and the American Medical Association. The partnership communicates regularly through conference calls and provides an opportunity for partners to discuss their local sodium reduction activities.

### COST

The Health Department has received extensive support from philanthropists and donors, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Association of City and County Health Officials, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the New York State Health Foundation.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The NSRI developed sodium reduction targets for 62 packaged food categories and 25 restaurant food categories. To date, 28 national packaged food, retail and restaurant companies have committed to NSRI targets. The NSRI uses public, purchased and company-reported data to assess (1) committed companies' success in meeting targets and (2) changes in sodium levels in each packaged food and restaurant food category. Additionally, in 2010 the Health Department collected urine from a representative sample of adult New York City residents to measure baseline sodium intake. This study will be repeated in 2015, contingent on funding.

### TIMELINE

#### 2008:

- October: NSRI launched at meeting with then-New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and food industry representatives.

#### 2009:

- All year: NSRI held meetings with the food industry to define categories, set salt reduction targets and discuss a monitoring and evaluation plan.

#### 2010:

- January: NSRI publicly released proposed targets with a three-week technical comment period.
- April: NSRI released final targets and announced the first 16 companies to commit.
- November: NSRI announced five additional company commitments.
- All year: Baseline sodium intake collected in a representative sample of New York City residents.

#### 2011:

- March: NSRI announced a total of 28 company commitments.
- March: NSRI released preliminary results of its 24-hour urinary sodium analysis.

#### 2012:

- January: Companies reported progress toward NSRI 2012 targets.
- All year: NSRI updated packaged and restaurant food databases.

#### 2013:

- February: NSRI announced that 21 companies achieved commitments to NSRI 2012 targets.

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### Planned

#### 2014:

- NSRI will assess changes in sodium content of packaged and restaurant foods.
- Companies should achieve NSRI 2014 targets by December.

#### 2015:

- NSRI will update packaged and restaurant food databases with companies' progress to date.
- NSRI will measure sodium intake in a representative sample of New York City residents and compare to baseline findings.

### LEGISLATION

The NSRI is a voluntary initiative. No laws or regulations were enacted or changed during its implementation.

### LESSONS LEARNED

National, voluntary initiatives like the NSRI have the potential to decrease the sodium content of foods. Measurable, transparent targets and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation are key components of success. National partnerships by cities, states, national health organizations and other interested parties can effectively demonstrate support for a specific issue and can bring industry to the table.

### TRANSFERABILITY

Attention to sodium reduction has grown in the United States and around the world. Reports such as the Institute of Medicine's *Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intake in the United States* and the 2010 U.S. Dietary guidelines have brought national and international spotlight to the need for sodium reduction. In addition, the NSRI was able to draw on the example of the United Kingdom's Salt Reduction Campaign in its creation and implementation. Cross-national collaboration and communication is critical, given that many of the largest packaged food and restaurant companies operate internationally.

The experience of building the NSRI databases informed the development of MenuStat ([www.MenuStat.org](http://www.MenuStat.org)), a public database of foods and beverages served by over 60 of the nation's largest restaurant chains. National nutrition databases are critical to tracking changes in the food supply. They are essential to providing accessible nutrition information for consumers, governments and researchers. These databases also provide a tool for federal and local governments to monitor the impact of current and future nutrition policy initiatives.

### CONTACTS

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.