



Canadian Stroke Network
Réseau canadien contre
les accidents cérébrovasculaires



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2009 Canadian “Salt Lick Award” goes to the country’s pizza producers

Pizza delivers a wallop of blood-pressure raising sodium in every slice

OTTAWA, Feb.2 —Three of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence – the Canadian Stroke Network, the Canadian Obesity Network and the Advanced Foods and Materials Network – today awarded the second annual national “Salt Lick Award” to the country’s pizza producers for loading the popular fast-food with blood-pressure raising sodium.

The level of sodium in a couple of pieces of pizza can far exceed the recommended daily intake for adults of 1,500 mg. as well as the Upper Tolerable Limit of 2,300 mg. of sodium.

In fact, so many examples of sodium-laden pizza products are available across the country that the triumvirate of health-focused networks bestowed the Salt Lick Award on the pizza industry as a whole. Consider these examples, based on a scan of nutritional information posted on pizza makers’ own websites:

- Two slices (292 grams total) of a Pepperoni Lover’s large stuffed crust pizza at Pizza Hut contain 3,000 mg of sodium – double the recommended intake for a full day.
- Two slices (284 grams total) of a large Rustic Italian pizza at Boston Pizza contain 2,580 mg of sodium.
- One large slice (339 grams) of Meat Supreme from a walk-in Pizza Pizza restaurant contains 2,400 mg of sodium.

The three national networks are calling for increased awareness of the impact of high-sodium foods and the need to reduce the sodium content in fast foods and restaurant meals. The first “Salt Lick Award” was given to A&W for their “Chubby Junior” Meal, a fast food option that, one year later, still contains 1,910 milligrams of sodium.

According to Statistics Canada (Health Reports, Vol. 18, No. 2), processed foods are the main source of sodium in the diets of Canadians, accounting for 77 per cent of our average daily sodium intake. The same report says that pizza, submarines, hamburgers and hotdogs account for a large percentage of daily intakes.

“The onus is on the food processing industry to cut back on sodium in processed meats and cheese used to make pizza,” says Dr. Kevin Willis, a Canadian Stroke Network director and spokesman on the issue. “Action is urgently needed.”

In the meantime, pizza should only be consumed as an occasional treat. When ordering pizza, avoid processed meats, ask for little or no cheese, and limit the number of slices.

In addition, consumers need to consider that not all pizza is created equal. For example, while two slices (292 grams) of Pepperoni Lover's from Pizza Hut contains 3,000 mg of sodium, two slices (209 grams) of Vegetarian pizza from East Side Mario's contains 723 mg of sodium and two slices (208 grams) of thin crust Beef Taco pizza from Panago contains 260 mg of sodium. "There are better choices out there and I encourage consumers to do their homework. It only takes five minutes to look online for the nutritional information of any fast-food option and to make a healthier choice," says Dr. Willis.

Health Canada's Sodium Working Group will meet in Ottawa from Feb. 18 to 20 to begin development of a strategy to lower sodium content in the diets of Canadians. The strategy will include education, voluntary reductions of sodium levels in processed foods and research.

A high-sodium diet increases blood pressure and high blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease, kidney disease and dementia. High sodium consumption has also been linked to osteoporosis, asthma, stomach cancer and obesity.

"High levels of sodium in fast and prepared foods often go hand-in-hand with higher calories and fat content, adding significant health risks to the equation," explains Dr. Arya M. Sharma, Scientific Director of the Canadian Obesity Network. "Overweight and obese people have heightened sensitivity to the effects of sodium, and will experience higher increases in blood pressure in response to sodium intake than normal-weight individuals. It is therefore extremely important for people above a healthy weight to limit salt intake in the diet."

Excessive sodium intake is responsible for the premature death of more than 30 Canadians a day, according to research published in the *Canadian Journal of Cardiology*.

"The message is clear - Canadians are asking for healthier alternatives," notes the Advanced Foods and Materials Network's Chief Research Officer Dr. Rickey Yada. "Our researchers are responding by not only using food to find *cures* for diseases such as hypertension and kidney disease but also by looking at foods' potential to *prevent* disease and making these power foods available to consumers. Restaurants need to follow suit, providing healthy options and removing toxic ones."

The "Salt Lick" award coincides with World Salt Awareness Week - an effort by some 20 countries around the world to highlight the excessive amounts of sodium in fast-food and restaurant fare.

Learn more about the dangers of excessive sodium consumption at www.sodium101.ca

About the Canadian Stroke Network (www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca)

The Canadian Stroke Network includes more than 100 of Canada's leading scientists and clinicians from 24 universities who work collaboratively on various aspects of stroke. The Network, which is headquartered at the University of Ottawa, also includes partners from industry, the non-profit sector, provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Stroke

Network, one of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, is committed to reducing the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole.

About the Canadian Obesity Network (www.obesitynetwork.ca)

The Canadian Obesity Network (CON) links obesity researchers with practitioners, policymakers, and the private sector to foster cost-effective solutions to prevent, control and treat obesity. CON boasts more than 3,000 professional members across Canada.

About the Advanced Foods and Materials Network (www.afmnet.ca)

The Advanced Foods & Materials Network (AFMNet), one of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, is a nationwide initiative that brings together researchers in biochemistry, engineering, health, law and society focused on innovative aspects of food & materials including developing new functional foods and evaluating the perceptions and impact of Natural Health Product Regulations. Collaboration and networking are key for AFMNet: Over 175 researchers at 22 universities help identify gaps in existing research capacity and support the training of highly qualified individuals destined to become leaders in industry, academia and government. Together, AFMNet is increasing innovation and enhancing competitiveness for Canada.

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