

Salty Is Tasty? An Insight on Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptual Beliefs Related To Dietary Salt Intake Among Malaysian Adults

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INTRODUCTION

High sodium consumption is often associated with an increased risk of hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Previous research report indicates Malaysian's daily salt consumption exceeds the recommended level.

Past studies had shown health literate patients have better knowledge and control towards toward salt related diseases such as hypertension, and aware of salt restrictions.

Thus the study objective was to assess knowledge, attitudes and perceptions related to salt consumption among Malaysian adults which can facilitates health education initiatives for the public.

METHODOLOGY



This was a cross-sectional study involving 4400 Malaysian population aged 18 years above from different states within the 5 zones in Malaysia.



The districts were randomly selected comprising urban and rural localities, and respondents were approached from the residential and commercial areas.



Data was analysed using the adapted and validated self-administered questionnaire Health Literacy Scale for Low Salt Consumption Hong Kong Population (CHLSalt-HK) which is the first validated instrument for assessing health literacy related to low salt intake. Data was analyses descriptively and presented using means and frequencies.

RESULTS

Demography

Gender

Male (32.6%)
Female (67.4%)

Ethnicity

Malay; 73.7%,
Chinese; 10.7%,
Bumiputera Sabah; 7.4%,
Indian; 4.1%,
Bumiputera Sarawak; 3.6%,
Orang Asli; 0.5%

Age

20–25 years; 34%,
26–35; 31.4%,
36–45 years; 16.1%,
46–59; 9.3% and
above 60; 1.7%.

Location

Urban; 55.1 %,
Rural; 44.9%

Marital Status

Unmarried; 55.5%,
Married; 40.2%,
Divorced; 2.3%,
Widow/Widower; 2.2%

Household income

B40: 77.5%,
M40: 16.1%,
T20: 6.4%

Education

Completed Form 5; 33.9% (n=1492),
Certificate/Diploma /Matriculation; 29.5%,
Degree holder; 24.1% ,
Did complete secondary schooling,
Primary schooling level/
No formal education; 3.7%



Knowledge on Salt / Sodium & Salt Related Disease

- ▶ **69.1%** not aware of the recommended level of 5gm for daily salt intake by WHO.
- ▶ **65.7%** not aware of the relationship between Salt & Sodium even though they are aware of the terminology Sodium @ Natrium.
- ▶ More than **80%** could identify types of food containing high sodium content correctly except white bread.
- ▶ More than **85%** could identify hypertension as a disease related to high salt intake, followed **70%** able to relate it with diseases like heart problems, renal and stroke but unaware it can aggravate further other health conditions such diabetes, stomach cancer, osteoporosis etc.



Perceptual Beileif About Salt

- ▶ **88.7%** belief salt and flavour enhancer need to be added to enhance taste of cooking.
- ▶ **58.3%** belief sodium intake can be reduced by replacing salt with flavour enhancer.
- ▶ **87.6%** beleif food prepared outside (eg; restaurant, fast food, stalls) are more salty comparatively to home cooked meals.
- ▶ **89.7%** belief drinking more water will be able to neutralize salt intake.
- ▶ **65.1%** belief Kosher salt, Rock Salt/Garam Bukit, Himalaya Salt are healthier options as it contains less sodium than normal salt.



Attitudes Toward Salt Intake

- ▶ **90.2%** concern towards health problems caused by eating food with high salt content.
- ▶ **69.3%** agreed food that has low salt content doesn't taste good.
- ▶ **55.0%** also agreed they feel pressurised to control salt intake.
- ▶ **46.6%** agreed they enjoy eating salty food.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Majority of respondents are not aware of recommended daily salt intake level of and relationship between salt and sodium. However, most of them could identify types of food with high salt content and common diseases related to high salt intake; hypertension, stroke, renal disease, but couldn't associate with diseases like diabetes, osteoporosis, asthma etc.

Similarly findings in Bhane et.al. 2018 reported the proportion of participants who were able to identify the recommended salt intake for adults ranged from 4 to 54%, the relationship between salt and sodium was not well understood and people have less awareness on the associated risk between dietary salt and kidney disease, stomach cancer and osteoporosis (8–31%). Most of the respondents believe salt to be the key ingredient in enhancing food taste (Elias.M et.al 2020) and misconceptions about salt, such as the belief that specialty salts (Himalayan salts, pink salt, etc.) were healthier than regular table salt were more likely to translate into higher discretionary salt use (Grimes et.al, 2017, Sarmuga et.al, 2014).

The essential function of salt in cooking and food preparation is one of the main barrier to regulate salt consumption, which can be detrimental to overall health. Thus, it is important to educate public to calculate positive behaviour towards salt control such as avoiding processed foods, adapt to the flavour of low-salt food, opt for lower salt alternatives and use herbs and spices to increase the taste of the food rather than using salt or flavour enhancer (MSG, ketchups, sauces etc.)

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