

# Making a Difference 101



Thousands of heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and cancer deaths is a dear price to pay every year for trans-fat-spiked and over-salted foods, increased obesity rates, and low intake of fruits and vegetables.

On New Year's Eve, Prime Minister Harper boasted that setting targets to reduce sodium consumption in Canada was among 14 domestic "accomplishments" in 2010.

A few weeks later, the *Globe and Mail* observed that the Minister of Health had decommissioned her Sodium Working Group in early December, which prevented the group from

pressing the government to implement its sodium-reduction strategy. The Minister also bowed to food industry pressure to weaken its sodium targets, the paper noted. Oops.

It's not just sodium.

In 2006, the Trans Fat Task Force recommended that the government use its regulatory powers to get partially hydrogenated oils—which contain artery-clogging trans fat—out of the food supply once and for all. Since then, the government has pretty much done nothing. And while it's true that trans fat levels in foods have declined since 2006, even Health Canada's optimistic estimate of lower trans fat intake means that trans still kills 1,000 to 2,000 Canadians every year.

When it comes to saving tens of thousands of lives, the Federal Government seems intent on taking the longest time possible to do the least. So we shouldn't be surprised that it's also doing little to help Canadians avoid other—admittedly less damaging—risks.

A few examples:

■ Many Canadians are allergic—sometimes deathly so—to foods like shellfish, nuts, and wheat. Yet the federal regulation that requires labels to list allergens in plain language isn't much of an advance. *If the government really wanted to prevent allergic reactions, it would require allergens to be flagged in bold lettering.*



The Health Minister missed a great opportunity to lower sodium throughout the grocery store.

■ Last spring, Health Canada finally acknowledged the scientific evidence showing that artificial food dyes can exacerbate attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children. But its proposal to better label the presence of the dyes—which are only used to make foods look more appealing—is a recipe for ineffectiveness. *If the government really wanted to help kids with ADHD, it would ban artificial food dyes.*

■ Last month, Health Canada pooh-pooed a petition by the Centre for Science in the Public Interest—the non-profit publisher of *Nutrition Action Healthletter*—that called on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ban the use of "ammonia process caramel" as an artificial colouring in cola beverages and other foods. (Ammonia process caramel colouring is also used in Canada.) Yet compelling evidence links the colouring to cancer deaths in laboratory animals. *If the government really wanted to protect people from cancer, it would ban ammonia process caramel colouring.*

If the government really wanted to make a difference—saving lives and money—on sodium, trans fat, allergens, whatever, it would need to do things that really made a difference.

*Mike Jacobson*

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Centre for Science in the Public Interest

STAFF

EDITORIAL

**Michael F. Jacobson, PhD**  
Executive Editor

**Bonnie Liebman, MS**  
Director of Nutrition

**Stephen B. Schmidt**  
Editor-in-Chief

**Jayne Hurley, RD**  
**David Schardt**  
Senior Nutritionists

**Kate Sherwood**  
Culinary Director

**Melissa Pryputniewicz, BS**  
**Zahra Hassanali, MSc**  
Project Coordinators

**Namita Davis, BSc**  
**Neera Chaudhary, RD, MHSc**  
**Natalie Walsh, RD, MSc**  
**Marsha Rosen, RD**  
Consultants (Toronto)

**Bill Jeffery, LLB**  
National Coordinator (Ottawa)

**Jorge Bach**  
Art Director

CIRCULATION MANAGEMENT

**Dennis Bass**

Myriam Boucher  
Damon Dorsey  
Greg Hildebrandt  
Cecilia Saad  
Ken Waldmiller

Debra Brink  
Louella Fennell  
James Nocera  
Chris Schmidt

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD

**Monique Julien, MSc, DrPH**  
Université de Montréal  
Montreal, Quebec

**Mary McKenna, PhD, RD**  
University of New Brunswick  
Fredericton, New Brunswick

**Andrew Pipe, CM, MD, LLD, DSc**  
University of Ottawa Heart Institute  
Ottawa, Ontario

**Kim Raine, PhD, RD**  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta

**Frank Sacks, MD**  
Harvard Medical School  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Jeremiah Stamler, MD**  
Northwestern University Medical School  
Chicago, Illinois

**Norman Temple, PhD**  
Athabasca University  
Athabasca, Alberta

**Regina G. Ziegler, PhD, MPH**  
U.S. National Cancer Institute  
Bethesda, Maryland

*Nutrition Action Healthletter* (ISSN 0885-7792) is published 10 times a year (monthly except bi-monthly in Jan./Feb. and Jul./Aug.).

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

The cost for a one-year subscription or gift (10 issues) is \$36; two years are \$66 (GST/HST included). Mail to P.O. Box 4252, Toronto Sta. A, Toronto, ON M5W 5S4. For bulk subscriptions, please write for details. To change your address, send us your subscriber number and your old and new addresses four weeks before you move. If you don't want us to exchange your name, send us your name and mailing-label information. Fax: (202) 265-4954. E-mail: [circ@cspinet.org](mailto:circ@cspinet.org). World Wide Web: [www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org). Expiry date is in the upper centre of your mailing label. Your subscriber number precedes the expiry date. **GUARANTEE!** We'll give you 2 FREE ISSUES if there's ever a problem with your subscription.

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT  
NO. 40017740  
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO  
CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST  
P.O. BOX 4252, POSTAL STATION A  
TORONTO, ONTARIO M5W 5S4  
e-mail: [circ@cspinet.org](mailto:circ@cspinet.org)



The contents of NAH are not intended to provide medical advice, which should be obtained from a qualified health professional.

The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is the non-profit health-advocacy group that publishes *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. CSPI mounts educational programs and presses for changes in government and corporate policies.

The use of information from *Nutrition Action Healthletter* for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission from CSPI.

© 2011 by Centre for Science in the Public Interest.

Fit for the Future!

Consider naming CSPI in your will or living trust.

For info, e-mail [kknox@cspinet.org](mailto:kknox@cspinet.org).