Reduce salt to one teaspoon a day and lead a healthier happier life

Dr. Sitaram Dixit - Chairman, CGSI

Studies show that about two billion people get less iodine worldwide. Iodine deficiency leads to mental retardation. Even moderate iodine deficiency, especially in pregnant women and infants, lowers intelligence by approximately 10 to 15 IQ points. Severe iodine deficiency effects include disabling goiters, (16% of world’s population have mild goiter, a swollen thyroid gland in the neck), cretinism, and dwarfism. Unfortunately, Iodine deficiency disorders are still prevalent in our country according to the survey teams of different states and union territories.

Iodine is an essential dietary element required for the synthesis of the thyroid hormones, thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3). Synthesis and secretion of T4 and T3 are under the control of the thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) secreted from the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland. Dietary iodine deficiency stimulates TSH secretion that results in thyroid hypertrophy, occurring in a deficient supply of T3 and T4 hormones. The enlargement of the thyroid gland or endemic goiter is due to nutritional iodine deficiency. Iodine intakes consistently lower than 50 μg per day can result in goiter.

Nowadays, we find misleading advertisements and messages circulating on E-mails claiming that rock and sea salts are natural and so healthier. Rock salt that has a pinkish color and a nice sulphurous odor is 95-98% sodium chloride, with minor proportion of other minerals. Sea salt composition on the other hand is sodium (~55-56%) chloride (~30-31%), Sulphates (~7-8%), Magnesium (~3-4%), Calcium (~1%), Potassium (~1%), along with other minor constituents like bicarbonates (~0.40%), bromide (~0.2%), borate (~0.08%), Strontium (~0.05%), etc.

Table salt on the other hand is refined and purified having almost 99-100% sodium chloride. Uptake of iodine is more efficient if the salt used is refined. Purified salt is thus necessary, to improve iodine intake that is more important and essential to prevent iodine deficiency disorders.

Rock and sea salts are significantly no different from ordinary table salt. All of them have sodium chloride as the major chemical content and excess sodium intake causes harm. Frankly speaking, people eat too much salt, far more than the recommended guideline, i.e., one teaspoon a day.

Diet with high salt content leads to high blood pressure, risking a stroke, and heart failure. All salt brands majorly contain sodium chloride that is damaging to health equally when consumed in large quantities.

National Institute of Nutrition studies find that foods of animal origin have more iodine than plant foods. Fruits and vegetables have the lowest level of iodine content (2.7 to 20 μg per 100 g). Nuts and oilseeds have the highest amount of iodine (35 to 54 μg per 100 g) followed by spices (6 to 96 μg per 100 g) and condiments.

The existing universal salt iodization program, without doubt is thus leading to a good reduction in iodine deficiency disorders in endemic population groups of our country.

Reducing salt consumption in my opinion is the cheapest healthiest option. Stop adding extra salt to food altogether and lead a healthier happier life.

● ● ●

JAN - FEB 2013
KEEMAT

3