

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **New Study Shows How Salt Consumption Is Endangering Our Kids**

Springfield, OH – September 19, 2012 – The declining health of America's children has a lot to do with a culprit few even suspect: salt. A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study published in the journal *Pediatrics* has found that kids between the ages of 8 and 18 are eating as much salt as adults and more than twice the 1,500 daily milligrams recommended by the American Heart Association. These high sodium diets along with a related increase in obesity have led to increasing high blood pressure levels (once viewed as an adult illness) among our youth.

In short: a kitchen condiment considered a staple in every kitchen has compromised our children's health. In his new book *Salt Kills* (Health Now Books, 2012), Dr. Surender R. Neravetla—a heart surgeon and the Director of Cardiac Surgery at Springfield Regional Medical Center—explains in easy-to-understand language why salt can be even more of a problem during a child's formative years than it is later on in adulthood. Not only does it directly contribute to a host of childhood conditions, it sets children up for increased stroke and heart risk later in life.

Most people know that salt contributes to high blood pressure—that in turn inflicts irreversible damage on multiple organ systems, including the heart. But few think of this as a threat to children. A report from St. George's University of London, which revealed a connection of salt intake to high blood pressure in kids as young as four years old, shows us what a mistake that is. Yet it's an easy mistake to fix. A second report from that same institution, which summarized 13 different studies among children, concluded that the drop in blood pressure from not adding salt in infancy dramatically reduces blood pressure and cardiovascular problems as children grow older.

Yet another study published in the American Heart Association journal *Hypertension* shows just how far we have to go when it comes to bringing this problem under control. Pediatric hypertension-related hospitalizations in the United States have nearly doubled, from 12,661 in 1997 to 24,602 in 2006. During that same time period, inpatient care for hypertensive children reached an estimated \$3.1 billion, a 50 percent increase that doesn't even include outpatient charges nationwide.

Hypertension is now present in 1 to 3 percent of American children. However the salt threat extends beyond causing high blood pressure. We know that in adults, salt can cause problems including osteoporosis, dementia and stomach cancer, and that we're literally salting in the seeds of these incurable diseases during infancy and childhood. But some of those seeds are taking root well before children ever grow up.

One of the biggest problems confronting our kids today is obesity. More American children than ever before—almost one in three—are obese. Among these kids, the recent CDC study found that the risk for high blood pressure rose 74 percent for every 1,000 milligrams of increased sodium intake per day. That compared to only a 6 percent increase among normal-weight young people. Other salt-related health challenges can range from Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and, of course, high blood pressure to bone and joint problems, breathing difficulty, and a range of diseases including cancer. And we haven't even talked about the emotional and social challenges that come from being a fat kid.

Experts point to too much food (including too much sugar) and too little exercise when discussing what's responsible for the rise in childhood obesity. But they overlook the fact that salt is another leading player in this tragedy. Why do so many kids consume so many calories each day? Because salt overrides the mechanism in our body that tells us we're full. So kids keep eating all those processed and restaurant foods that are chock full of sodium and that make up more than 75 percent of the average American's diet.

But wait. There's more. Asthma now impacts 22 million children in this country. Adding salt to their diet—whether through the salt shaker or our menu choices—invites acute asthmatic attacks.

You would never want to promote your child's ill health. But that's exactly what we do every day. If you look at the "Top Ten Most Unwanted List" in Doctor Neravetla's book *Salt Kills*, almost every item is a staple in most kids' diets, including pizza, lunch meats, cheese, canned soups, boxed cereals, salty potato chips and carbonated drinks. Even baby food contains salt!

Adding salt to baby food is downright dangerous. Babies' systems are delicate. That's especially true of their kidneys, which can't process high amounts of sodium. Natural foods (including fruits, vegetables and breast milk or infant formula) already contain salt. Add more—whether using the salt shaker or processed foods like canned broth or crackers—and you run the risk of compromising your baby's kidneys and blood pressure. You could even cause brain damage. Research also shows that babies who start eating salt at a young age develop a taste for salt and keep eating it. We already know how harmful that is.

"Children's ill health has reached epidemic levels in this country," says Dr. Neravetla. "But this is a man-made disaster. As a parent, you would probably give your life to protect your youngsters from danger. So the last thing you want to do is to voluntarily feed them a diet that compromises their health now and in the future. The key to better health for our children is simple. We have to start by getting rid of enemy number one in our food: salt."

For more information about *Salt Kills* by Surender R. Neravetla, MD, FACS with Shantanu R. Neravetla, MD, visit <http://saltkills.com/> or call Sharon Cook at (707) 633-5547.

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