**National Salt Awareness Day 2002**

**The third National Salt Awareness Day was launched by CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Health) on Tuesday January the 29th 2002.**

The aim was to educate the public on the importance of reducing salt in the diet and how this can be achieved in a practical way. Special emphasis this year was on how a so called 'healthy eating' diet is not always low in salt.

To launch Salt Awareness Day, a briefing breakfast took place at the Terrace Marquee, House of Commons with presentations from Professor Graham MacGregor, Chef Raymond Blanc and CASH project coordinator Emma Fluck. Over 200 journalists, health professionals, doctors, and other stakeholders were invited to the event and received the press release. Major supermarkets were also invited to have a stand at the event. Despite rail strikes, 80 guests attended the event, which included journalists and photographers, radio presenters, media doctors, representatives from the Department of Health, The Food Standard Agency and Stakeholder organisations such as the British Heart Foundation and The British Dietetic Association. Each guest received a press pack which included the press release containing a quote from celebrity chef Nick Nairn (who was due to join the event but was held up in high winds at Glasgow Airport), Yvette Cooper, Minister of public health and Sir John Krebs, Chairman of the food Standards Agency.

**The presentations**
Professor MacGregor talked about the need to reduce salt in the diet in order to reduce the number of strokes and heart attacks in the UK as well as other health benefits to the population. As 80% of salt comes from processed food, he emphasised the need for the salt content of these foods to be reduced. He congratulated the major supermarkets and some of the food manufacturers such as Kellogg's and Heinz for the work that they had done so far but said that industry needed to take more action and follow suit. The reduction in salt already made needed to gradually continue, so that a target intake of 6g or less could be reached.

Well known chef Raymond Blanc talked about his experiences of reducing salt in his cooking. He said he had been brought up on a low salt diet and always uses salt carefully. He can't understand why people pour on so much salt in their cooking as it is possible to make fantastic tasting food without much salt. He added that people in this country, especially the younger generations, have a preference for salty foods and need to be re educated to be made aware of the dangers of using too much salt.

Emma Fluck, CASH project Co-ordinator then talked about the work of CASH and the emphasis for the day. This year was how salt can often be the forgotten message when talking about a healthy diet. CASH had calculated a typical day's intake of food, based on a healthy diet, but using meals based on processed food - It came to over 13 grams of salt, which is more than double the recommended intake of 6 grams a day. Gaynor also emphasised the need to reduce salt in processed foods, as we have become reliant on them in our diets. Even so-called healthy staples like bread and breakfast cereals are contributing to this high salt intake, so we are particularly keen to lobby the producers of such foods. Most supermarkets have already made great reductions in salt of their own brands and have also introduced consumer friendly labelling.

Finally Gaynor spoke of the evidence regarding the dangerous effects of salt on health has been strongly reinforced by some major studies in the last few years and the target salt intake for 6 grams or less a day has been re-endorsed by the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency and the Chief Medical Officer.

**The breakfast**

There was a fantastic low salt buffet style breakfast provided by the chefs at the House of Commons. The breakfast included; fresh fruit juices, smoothies, home made salt free mueslis, fruit platters, low salt breads and croissants with preserves.

**The supermarkets and food retailers**There were six table displays by the main supermarkets: Asda, Safeway, Sainsburys, Marks and Spencer, Tesco, Co-op, and also a table display by LoSalt. These displays showed how the organisations were reducing the salt in their own brands and sample packs were shown. Asda also produced a press release for the day.

The day was supported by funds from Tesco's and Sainbury's and Marks and Spencer sponsored the leaflet about salt and children.

**Resources**
To support the day, CASH produced some excellent resources which clearly get the message across that salt is bad for health and that consumers must watch out for salt even if following a so-called healthy diet. The pack includes; The Background brief "The evidence for the need to reduce salt in the diet", The effects of salt on health other than on hypertension, low salt recipe collection, the press release, CASH leaflet, Salt content of four common diets, the 4 CASH education leaflets and CASH members and acknowledgements.

With thanks to David Putman for taking photographs during the event.