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WORLD HEART DAY – SUNDAY 28th SEPTEMBER 08 KNOW YOUR RISK!

- Olympic marathon gold medal winner Stefano Baldini and IndyCar racer Danica Patrick give their support

A 3 gram reduction in a person's dietary intake of salt would result in over a 20% drop in deaths from stroke and over a 15% fall in deaths from heart disease.¹ As heart disease and stroke are the world's number one killer, causing 17.5 million deaths every year, eating half a teaspoon less of salt each day could save millions of lives.

High blood pressure or hypertension is the biggest single risk factor for heart disease and stroke and currently affects more than a billion people worldwide². However by the year 2025 it is estimated more than 1.5 billion people,³ or nearly one in three adults over the age of 25, will have high blood pressure. This is why this year's World Heart Day taking place on Sunday 28th September is urging people to take action and visit their health-care professional to "*Know Your Risk!*"

"I know my heart is the strongest, most important muscle in my body and a winning performance depends on its vitality," said Stefano Baldini, Olympic marathon gold medal winner. "Having a healthy diet will help keep my heart young and my career long."

¹ Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation. WHO Technical Report Series 916: Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. 2003. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2003.

² AHA, Journal Report 04/10/2007.

³ AHA, Journal Report 04/10/2007.

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There are several factors which increase the risk of developing high blood pressure, including the excessive consumption of salt. “However, by adopting lifestyle changes hypertension is controllable,” says Professor Shahryar Sheikh, President of the World Heart Federation. Avoiding foods high in salt, refraining from adding salt and being aware of the salt content of food in restaurants and processed foods, could potentially reduce salt consumption by 3 grams a day.

Risk factors for heart disease and stroke include high blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels, smoking, inadequate intake of fruit and vegetables, overweight, obesity and physical inactivity. Taken together, these major risk factors account for around 80% of deaths from heart disease and stroke⁴.

“Not enough of us are aware whether our own lifestyle and heritage could be contributing to our risk of developing heart disease and stroke. It is never too early and never too late to start taking care of your heart,” says Professor Sheikh.

Commenting on why using World Heart Day as a catalyst for change is so important, Danica Patrick, who recently won her first IndyCar series race said: “I have probably taken more risks than most, driving in IndyCar races. However I’ve never taken any risks with my heart and I have a check-up on a regular basis and I would urge everyone to do the same.”

Professor Sheikh adds: “By finding out your level of risk you are taking a simple but significant step towards living a longer and better life.” It is possible to develop high blood pressure at any age and there are no obvious symptoms. The only way to know if you are at risk is to visit a health-care professional for a check-up. This is why this year’s World Heart Day taking place on Sunday 28th September is urging people to visit their health-care professional to “*Know Your Risk!*”

⁴ WHO Report : Preventing Chronic Diseases, A Vital Investment, 2005.

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In its ninth year, World Heart Day is run by the World Heart Federation's member organizations in over 100 countries with many thousands of people expected to join in events this year. World Heart Day activities will include health checks, organized walks, runs and fitness sessions, public talks, stage shows, scientific forums, exhibitions, concerts, carnivals, and sports tournaments.

Heart disease and stroke cause the equivalent of more than one death every two seconds⁵, as many deaths as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and diabetes, all forms of cancer and chronic respiratory disease combined.⁶ There is a vast public misperception and disproportional lack of attention paid to people's risk of heart disease and stroke in relation to more sensational health issues. As a result, people tend to overestimate the number of deaths from rarer and infrequent risks while underestimating those from more common causes such as heart disease and stroke.

This is also why Scott Dixon, this year's winner of the Indianapolis 500, is supporting World Heart Day. Scott said: "As an IndyCar Series driver I go wheel to wheel every Sunday at 220 mph but I don't want to take risks with my heart health and I therefore see my health-care professional for regular check-ups. World Heart Day is a great initiative and I'm pleased to be a part of it."

For more information about World Heart Day 2008 and events happening near you, visit:

www.worldheartday.com

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⁵ WHO Report: Preventing Chronic Diseases, A Vital Investment, 2005.

⁶ WHO 2005 – Preventing Chronic Diseases: A Vital Investment.

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Editors' Note: How to reduce salt in your diet

The UK Food Standard Agency (www.salt.gov.uk) provides the following dietary tips to make sure people do not consume excess salt and to help protect them from heart disease and stroke.

Hidden salt

When most people think of salt, they think of shaking it on their food, or adding a pinch to cooking. However, you also need to be careful about the salt you can't see. The World Health Organization recommends a maximum quantity of 5 grams of salt a day⁷, which is about a teaspoonful. This is not a large amount, especially when you consider that 75% of the salt we eat is already in the food we buy. Therefore, before you assume that you don't eat too much salt, take a look at what you're buying, as well as how you use salt at home.

Tips on reducing salt in your diet

There are a lot of simple ways to reduce the amount of salt you eat, whether you're cooking or choosing food at the shops. Try not to add salt automatically when you're cooking or about to eat. Often people only use salt out of habit.

When you cook, there are lots of ways to add flavor to your cooking without using any salt.

- Add fresh herbs, use black pepper, garlic, ginger, chili and lime in stir fries.
- Marinate meat and fish in advance to give them more flavor.
- Roast vegetables such as red peppers, courgettes, fennel, parsnips and squash to bring out their flavor.

When you eat, there are lots of ways to eat less salt.

- Choose healthier breakfast cereals. Try puffed wheat, wheat biscuits or muesli with no added salt.
- Snack on plain popcorn or unsalted nuts and seeds, instead of crisps or crackers.
- Go easy with ketchup, soy sauce, mustard, pickles and mayonnaise - these can all be high in salt.
- When you have a salad, use only as much dressing as you need. Some dressings can be high in salt.

When you buy food, find out the amount of salt in foods, you normally eat. You will then discover how easy it can be to eat more than 5 grams. One of the simplest ways to cut down on salt is to compare foods and choose those which have a lower salt content whenever you can. A quick way to tell if a food is high in salt is by looking at the nutritional information on the label:

- High is more than 1.5 grams salt per 100 grams (or 0.6 grams sodium).
- Low is 0.3 grams salt or less per 100 grams (or 0.1 grams sodium).

⁷ Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation. WHO Technical Report Series 916: Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. 2003. World Health Organization. Geneva, 2003.

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About the World Heart Federation

The World Heart Federation is a nongovernmental organization based in Geneva Switzerland dedicated to the prevention and control of heart disease and stroke, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries. It comprises 196 member societies of cardiology and heart foundations from over 100 countries covering the regions of Asia-Pacific, Europe, East Mediterranean, the Americas and Africa. For further information, visit: www.worldheart.org

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