Survey on data of sodium in processed and prepared foods of Latin America

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Rationale and objective: Current and high-quality data on the sodium content of foods is critical to estimate the baseline consumption, identify the main food sources and monitor intervention strategies for this micronutrient. The study was a regional survey of the needs and plans of LATINFOODS branches on the sodium content in processed and prepared foods.
Methods: A semi-structured questionnaire with 26 questions on sodium content in processed and prepared foods was emailed in February 2011 to LATINFOODS members and related laboratories from 19 countries. Foods were classified into 14 categories.
Results: 22 forms were completed with a return rate by country of 75%. The profile of the respondents was: academic (59%) and from governmental institutions (36%); food composition data (FCD) generators and compilers (52%); LATINFOODS members (68%) and the remaining (32%) were interested in participating in the network. 68% had some information on sodium content in all food categories, mainly in breads, cereals and snacks. Data was generated mostly in the last two decades, and some had recent data. The purposes for FDC generation and compilation are FC tables and databases, research and laboratory services. The reported analytical methodologies for sodium were AOAC (82%) and none have this assay accredited. 100% of participants need updated data on sodium content for all food categories. At least 57% of generators are interested in training in sample size estimation, preparation and sodium analysis. Convenience foods, snacks and cereals were identified as priority foods for sodium content estimation. The majority (73%) require funds to purchase reference materials, laboratory supplies and samples. 100% indicated support for the PAHO Initiative on „Prevention of cardiovascular diseases in the Americas by reducing dietary salt consumption „ and other regional and local health plans /programs.
Conclusions: There is strong interest in those surveyed to assess the sodium content of foods and working with PAHO programs to reduce dietary salt. Up to date information on the sodium content of food is needed in the region, as well as resources and training to obtain this data.