

Estimating mean change in population salt intake using spot urine samples

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Epidemiology</i>
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Date Submitted by the Author:	n/a
Complete List of Authors:	Petersen, Kristina; The George Institute for Global Health , Food Policy Wu, Jason; The George Institute for Global Health, Food Policy Webster, Jacqui; The George Institute for Global Health Grimes, Carley; Deakin University Woodward, Mark; The George Institute for Global Health, Professorial Unit; Johns Hopkins University, Epidemiology Nowson, Caryl; Deakin University, Neal, Bruce; The George Institute for Global Health,
Key Words:	salt intake, sodium, spot urine collection, 24-hour urine collection

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ESTIMATING MEAN CHANGE IN POPULATION SALT INTAKE USING SPOT URINE SAMPLES

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ABSTRACT

Background: Spot urine samples are easier to collect than 24-hour urine samples and can be used with estimating equations to derive the mean daily salt intake of a population. Whether equations using data from spot urine samples can also be used to estimate change in mean daily population salt intake over time is unknown. To compare estimates of change in mean daily population salt intake based upon 24-hour urine collections with estimates derived using equations based on spot urine samples.

Methods: Paired and unpaired 24-hour urine samples and spot urine samples were collected from individuals in two Australian populations in 2011 and 2014. Estimates of change in daily mean population salt intake between 2011 and 2014 were obtained directly from the 24-hour urine samples and by applying established estimating equations (Kawasaki, Tanaka, Mage, Toft, INTERSALT) to the data from spot urine samples. Differences between 2011 and 2014 were calculated using mixed models.

Results: A total of 1000 participants provided a 24-hour urine sample and spot urine sample in 2011 and 1012 did so in 2014 (paired samples n=870; unpaired samples n=1142). The mean (95% confidence interval) difference in population salt intake between 2011 and 2014 determined from the 24-hour urine samples was 0.48g/day (-0.74 to -0.21; p<0.001). The corresponding result estimated from the spot urine samples were -0.24 g/day (-0.42 to -0.06; p=0.01) using the Tanaka equation, -0.42 g/day (-0.71 to -0.12; p=0.005) using the Kawasaki equation, -0.51 g/day (-1.00 to -0.01; p=0.046) using the Mage equation, -0.26 g/day (-0.42 to -0.10; p=0.001) using the Toft equation, -0.20g/day (-0.32 to -0.09; p=0.001) using the INTERSALT equation and -0.27g/day (-0.39 to -0.15; p<0.001) using the INTERSALT equation with potassium. The differences derived from the 24-hour collections and estimating equations were not different (all p>0.058).

Conclusions: All the estimating equations based upon spot urine samples identified a similar difference in daily salt intake to that detected by the 24-hour urine samples. These data suggest that

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methods based upon spot urine samples are likely to provide an approach to measuring change in mean population salt intake.

Keywords: salt intake, sodium, spot urine collection, 24-hour urine collection

Key messages:

Collection of spot urine samples to measure the change in population salt intake is a feasible alternative to 24-hour urine collection.

All of the currently used estimating equations based upon spot urine samples detected a similar difference in salt intake to 24-hour urine collection.

Additional analyses in diverse population using larger datasets are required to better quantify the way that approaches based upon spot urine samples perform.

INTRODUCTION

High blood pressure is a leading cause of global disease burden (1) and excess salt consumption is a well-established cause of raised blood pressure. It was recently estimated that salt consumption above the World Health Organization's recommended maximum of 5g/day causes 1.65 million deaths each year comprising 9.5% of all cardiovascular disease deaths worldwide (2). Salt reduction has also been identified as a global health priority because it is projected to be one of the most cost-effective strategies for reducing blood pressure and vascular disease (3).

All Member States of the World Health Organization have agreed to a global target to reduce mean population salt intake by 30% by 2025 (4). Integral to achieving this goal is being able to measure salt intake accurately enough to track changes in population salt intake over time. The collection of 24-hour urine samples is currently the accepted best method for determining daily salt intake in an individual or population, especially if replicated using multiple sampling (5). It is also the currently accepted best method for detecting change in daily salt intake in an individual or population over time. However, while 24-hour urine samples may be a good method for determining salt excretion in clinical settings with highly trained staff, it is a suboptimal method for the monitoring of general populations in community surveys. The method is burdensome for subjects which can limit participation and affect the representativeness of participants in population surveys (6). Incomplete collection of 24-hour urine samples is also very common and results in an under-estimation of true salt intake (7).

Equations that estimate 24-hour salt intake from a spot urine sample can provide a reasonable estimate of mean population consumption levels and use of them may increase participation rates in surveys (8-11). However, compared to measures based upon 24-hour urine samples, the equations tend to overestimate salt intake at lower levels of consumption and to underestimate intake at higher levels of consumption (11). This proportional bias would be expected to result in an underestimate of the *change* in salt intake over time when estimating equations are used instead of 24-hour urine collections. The greater within person variability in measures based upon spot urine samples compared to 24-hour urine

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samples would also be expected to impact upon the power to detect changes in mean population salt intake over time. The aim of this study was to determine the estimated change in mean population salt intake in two selected Australian populations using standard measures based upon 24-hour urine samples and to compare the findings to estimates made using measures based upon spot urine samples.

METHODS

This work utilized data collected as part of an Australian National Health and Medical Research Council-supported project designed to measure the effectiveness of local, regional and national interventions to reduce salt consumption in Australia. The data are derived from surveys conducted amongst individuals in the State of Victoria and the town of Lithgow in the State of New South Wales. In Lithgow a community-based salt reduction program was implemented between 2011 and 2014 (12) which reduced population salt consumption. The Victorian study was not accompanied by a local salt reduction program and no change in salt intake was observed between 2011 and 2014(13). The project was done between 2010 and 2015 and was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committees of the University of Sydney, Alfred Hospital and Deakin University. All survey participants provided written informed consent and the study was registered at <http://clinicaltrials.gov> (NCT02105727).

Participants

Participants were community dwelling individuals aged over 18 years. There were no exclusions based on use of medications or any other aspect of demography, personal or medical history. The sampling methodology has been previously published (12, 13). Briefly, the participants enrolled at baseline in 2011 were a mix of individuals that were randomly sampled and those that volunteered to participate. For the follow-up survey in 2014, individuals that were involved in the baseline survey were invited and additional participants were recruited by random sampling and community advertisements. Therefore we have individuals that participated in both 2011 and 2014 (paired data) and a sample that participated in either 2011 or 2014 (unpaired data).

Urine sample collection

A single 24-hour urine sample and a single spot urine sample were collected at each participant contact. The 24-hour urine collection was obtained by discarding the first voided urine upon waking on the day of collection and then collecting all voided urine up to and including the first void the following morning. The times at the beginning and the end of urine collection were recorded and the time-adjusted 24-hour salt excretion was calculated. For each individual, the 24-hour sodium excretion value (mmol/day) was calculated as the concentration of sodium in the urine (mmol/L) multiplied by the urinary volume (L/day) multiplied by the time adjustment factor. The conversion from sodium (mmol/day) to sodium (mg/day) was made by multiplying by 23, and the conversion from sodium (g/day) to salt (g/day) was made by multiplying the sodium value by 2.54. The same process was used for urine samples collected in both Victoria and Lithgow. Suspected incomplete 24-hour urine collections (i.e. urinary creatinine < 4.0 mmol/day for women, or < 6.0 mmol/day for men or a 24-hour urine collection of < 500ml for either gender) and suspected over-collections (i.e. urinary creatinine or collection volumes > 3 standard deviations above the population mean) were excluded from the analysis.

Participants performed 24-hr urine collections and collected a spot collection in a separate container within this period. Participants from Victoria were randomly allocated to collect their spot urine either after their evening meal or just prior to bedtime. Participants in Lithgow performed their spot collection at the second morning void. The spot urine sodium concentration was measured separately and the volume of the spot urine samples were recorded. The volume and concentration of the spot urine samples were added to the remainder of the 24-hour data to derive the full 24-hour excretion.

Estimating equations for spot urine samples

Daily salt excretion was estimated from the spot urine specimens by applying a series of established predictive equations that utilise the concentration of sodium in the spot urine along with a range of other variables. The equations tested were: Tanaka (14), Kawasaki (15), Toft (16), Mage (17, 18), INTERSALT without potassium and INTERSALT with potassium (9) (see supplementary table 1). All of

these equations also incorporate urinary creatinine concentration, age, weight and height (or body mass index (BMI)). In addition most provide separate equations for each sex (Kawasaki, Mage, Toft, INTERSALT) and two include modifications by ethnicity (INTERSALT and Mage).

Statistical methods

For each sodium measurement method (24-hour urines or estimating equations based upon spot urine samples) mixed effect modelling was used to make estimates of the difference between mean population salt intake levels in 2011 and 2014. No adjustments were made for age, sex, weight or BMI. This method allows for paired and unpaired data to be analysed jointly. Participant characteristics were compared between 2011 and 2014 using the same method for the continuous variables and Pearson’s chi squared test for the gender distribution. Using paired t tests (paired data only), the change estimate provided by the equations based upon spot urine samples were compared to the change estimated from the 24-hour urine samples. Using the paired data only, the difference between the change estimates provided by the equations based upon spot urine samples and the 24-hour urine samples were plotted against the change estimates derived from the 24-hour urine samples in order to determine the degree of bias in spot urine based results at any level of salt difference according to the 24-hour urine sample (the generally preferred method of estimation). A regression line was fitted to these data. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows (Version 23, SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL). A p-value of <0.05 was deemed unlikely to have arisen by chance.

RESULTS

There were 1000 eligible participants in 2011 and 1012 in 2014. This comprised 435 individuals from whom samples were collected in both 2011 and 2014 (Lithgow n=135; Victoria n=300), 565 individuals who provided samples in 2011 alone (Lithgow n=280; Victoria n= 285) and 577 individuals who provided samples in 2014 alone (Lithgow n=446; Victoria n= 131). These numbers exclude thirty six individuals for whom the 24-hour urine specimens were suspected to be incomplete, 34 without a spot urine sample, two because height was not recorded and 3 because weight was not recorded.

Participants were on average approximately 3 years older in 2014 compared to 2011 for both the Lithgow and Victoria population samples (Table 1). In Lithgow this difference was driven by the ageing of the participants studied in both 2011 and 2014 (the paired subset) but was apparent for both the paired and unpaired subset in the Victoria sample (Supplementary table 2). The proportion male, mean weight and mean BMI were not different between 2011 and 2014 for the overall sample, the Lithgow sample alone or the Victoria sample alone.

Estimated difference in mean population salt consumption

The overall mean difference in population salt intake between 2011 and 2014 determined from the 24-hour urine samples was -0.48g/day (-0.74 to -0.21; $p<0.001$) (Figure 1) primarily as a consequence of a reduction observed in the Lithgow sample. The corresponding mean differences estimated from the spot urine samples were -0.24g/day (-0.42 to -0.06; $p=0.01$) using the Tanaka equation, -0.42g/day (-0.71 to -0.12; $p=0.005$) using the Kawasaki equation, -0.51g/day (-1.00 to -0.01; $p=0.046$) using the Mage equation, -0.26g/day (-0.42 to -0.10; $p=0.001$) using the Toft equation, -0.20g/day (-0.32 to -0.09; $p=0.001$) using the INTERSALT equation and -0.27g/day (-0.39 to -0.15; $p<0.001$) using the INTERSALT equation with potassium.

Based on 24-hour urine samples, there were similar reductions in estimated daily mean salt intake for both the paired and unpaired subsets of individuals (Figure 1). For the estimating equations, however, significant reductions were observed only for the estimates based upon the paired data. For the paired data, the difference in salt intake estimated by the equations based upon spot urine samples were comparable to the difference estimate provided by the 24-hour urine samples for all comparisons (all $p>0.058$).

The plots of the differences based upon the paired data showed, in every case, that the estimating equations using spot urine samples resulted in biased estimates of the difference, with the size of the bias proportional to the size of the change estimated from the 24-hour urine samples (Figure 2). While

the absolute magnitude of the bias was fairly small for small differences it resulted in large under-estimates when the differences estimated from the 24-hour samples were large.

For the analyses done separately on the Lithgow data alone, only the INTERSALT equations identified the reduction detected by the 24-hour urine measurements (Supplementary table 3). For both INTERSALT equations the magnitude of the reduction measured by the 24-hour urine samples was markedly underestimated. For the analyses of the Victoria data alone, all the equations identified the reduction detected by the 24-hour urine measurements (Supplementary table 4). As for the primary analyses that included both the unpaired and paired data it was the application of the equations to the paired data that most consistently identified the reduction measured by the 24-hour samples.

DISCUSSION

These data suggest that spot urine samples may provide an alternative method for measuring changes in mean population salt intake over time. Our most robust test of this hypothesis is that based upon the large combined dataset and in these analyses every estimation method based upon spot urine samples identified the difference in salt excretion documented by the 24-hour urine samples. For all the predictive equations, except the Mage equation, the point estimate of effect was numerically less than that recorded for the 24-hour urine samples although the analysis of the paired data identified no differences in the change estimates derived from the estimating equations compared to those derived from the 24-hour urine samples although the power of the analyses was limited.

These results add to growing body of literature suggesting that spot urine samples may be a viable alternative to 24-hour urine collections for population assessments of salt intake. Our previously conducted meta-analysis showed that estimates based upon spot urine samples can be used to determine whether mean population salt intake is above or below 5g/day target recommended by the World Health Organization so that objective decisions about the requirement for salt reduction strategies can be made (11). Our new analysis, using spot urine samples collected at serial time points

now provides the first evaluation of how spot urine samples might be used to monitor changes in population salt intake over time.

In our analyses the absolute estimates of 24-hour salt excretion based upon spot urine samples sometimes varied considerably from the levels based upon 24-hour collections. For example, the Kawasaki equation estimated the mean 24-hour salt excretion to be 11.8g in 2011 and 11.4g in 2014 compared to corresponding excretion measures based upon 24-hour urine samples of 8.4g and 7.9g. Of note, however, while the absolute estimates derived using each method were quite disparate (about 11g vs. about 8g) the within-method differences in mean daily intake over time were very similar - about -0.48g by the 24-hour urine samples and about -0.42g using the Kawasaki equation. So, while substantial bias may be present at each measurement time-point for the spot urine-based methods this may not reduce the capacity of these equations to detect a change in salt intake over time if population samples are appropriately matched for key variables included in the predictive equations (e.g. weight, height, BMI, age, gender). This may also explain why when the same individuals were studied (paired analyses) the point estimates of change provided by the spot urine samples were most comparable to the estimates provided by the 24-hour urine samples.

Our findings align with what might be expected based upon the known characteristics of spot urine samples as a measurement method. First, the estimates based upon spot urine samples provided less clearly significant findings (difference estimates had larger p-values and/or wider confidence intervals) than those based upon 24-hour urine samples. This is a consequence of the less precise estimate of an individual's salt intake provided by an estimate based upon a spot urine sample than a 24-hour urine sample. However, if it is mean population levels of intake (or change in intake) that are of interest, such as when estimating changes in population salt intake in response to a national salt reduction program, then it should be possible to address greater imprecision at the individual level simply by utilising a larger sample size. Calculations based upon fairly conservative assumptions suggest that about five times as many spot urine as 24-hour urine samples would be required to achieve comparable power to detect a

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given reduction in salt intake (Supplementary table 5). While this is a large increment, spot urine samples are much easier to collect and much less burdensome for survey participants so much higher participation rates are likely.

For salt intake estimation methods based upon spot urine samples the situation is complicated by a second issue of bias identified by our prior meta-analysis of cross-sectional data (11). Compared to 24-hour urine samples, estimates based upon spot urine samples collected at the same time point systematically underestimate salt intake at high levels and systematically overestimate salt intake at low levels. The magnitude of this effect is such that a true reduction in salt excretion measured by 24-hour urine samples of 10% (from 10g/day) would be underestimated by about one fifth and observed as an 8% reduction if measured using spot urine samples. An investigation of the paired data in the current analysis showed that bias was present when spot urine samples were used to measure the change in salt intake over time. For small reductions in mean intake, the nature of the bias was in line with that anticipated from the prior research (11), although it is not clear whether this would be true for larger reductions. The biases in spot urine estimates of 24-hour salt excretion suggested by the current analysis and the prior work done in the field (11) highlight the need for further research and the investigation of possible new and better equations that can provide reliable estimates across a broad range of salt intake levels.

Currently there are six established equations which can be used to estimate 24-hour salt intake from a spot urine sample and there is no clarity about which equation to use. This is an important issue because the World Health Organization has added spot urine samples to the STEPwise approach to Surveillance (STEPS) protocol for measurement of salt intake. Our prior meta-analysis showed heterogeneity in estimates of salt intake based on the spot urine equation used (11) and while analyses of the paired data in the current study suggested comparable difference estimates across all the estimating equations and 24-hour urine samples, statistical power to detect variation across the equations was limited. It might have been anticipated that the INTERSALT and Toft equations would perform best on these data which

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3 derive from Australian populations broadly comparable in characteristics to the North American and
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5 Danish populations from which the INTERSALT and Toft equations were derived (16). This certainly
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7 seems to be true for the estimation of absolute levels of intake but these equations did not appear to
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9 perform better in estimating change in mean intake over time.
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12 In the analysis which included both the New South Wales and Victorian data a reduction in salt intake of
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14 0.48g/day was shown between 2011 and 2014. This should not be misinterpreted to suggest that there
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16 has been a population reduction in salt intake in Australia during this time. This result is largely driven by
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18 the data from one town in New South Wales where a targeted salt reduction intervention reduced
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20 population salt intake and no comparable effect was observed in Victoria (13).
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24 To maximise the sample size available for these analyses both unpaired and paired data were used for
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26 the primary analyses. However in practice, serial surveys of population salt consumption are likely to
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28 include different individuals drawn from the same population on each occasion (unpaired data). The
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30 estimates of change based upon unpaired spot urine samples reported here were unconvincing although
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32 the sample size was insufficiently large to robustly test the unpaired data alone. Additional data from
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34 unpaired analyses are required to clarify if the apparent difference between the findings for the paired
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36 and unpaired analyses are real or the consequence of chance. The relatively small sample size also
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38 precluded us from completing subgroup analyses to explore the consistency of the findings across groups
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40 defined by age, sex and other characteristics. Spot urine collections occurred at different times of the
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42 day (morning, evening, bedtime) with about two thirds of spot samples collected in the evening. Cross-
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44 sectional data from a prior study (8) showed that spot urine-based estimates of 24-hour excretion
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46 derived from afternoon and evening spot samples performed better than morning or overnight spot
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48 samples and this may explain some differences in the findings for the Victoria compared to Lithgow data.
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Conclusion

All the estimating equations based upon spot urine samples identified the reduction in daily salt intake detected by the 24-hour urine samples and these data suggest that methods based upon spot urine samples are likely to provide an approach to measuring change in mean population salt intake over time. However, additional analyses in diverse population using larger datasets are required to better quantify the way that approaches based upon spot urine samples perform. It also seems likely that with a large dataset it will be possible to develop new, less biased equations that are specifically designed to detect change over time using spot urine samples.

Funding

This work was supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) Program Grant (APP1052555) and data collection was funded by an NHMRC Partnership Project Grant (APP571439). BN is supported by a NHMRC Principal Research Fellowship (APP1106947). JW is supported by a joint NHMRC and Heart Foundation Career Development Fellowship (1082924).

Conflicts of interest

JW is the Director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Population Salt Reduction with a remit to support countries to achieve the global targets of a 30% reduction in population salt intake by 2025.

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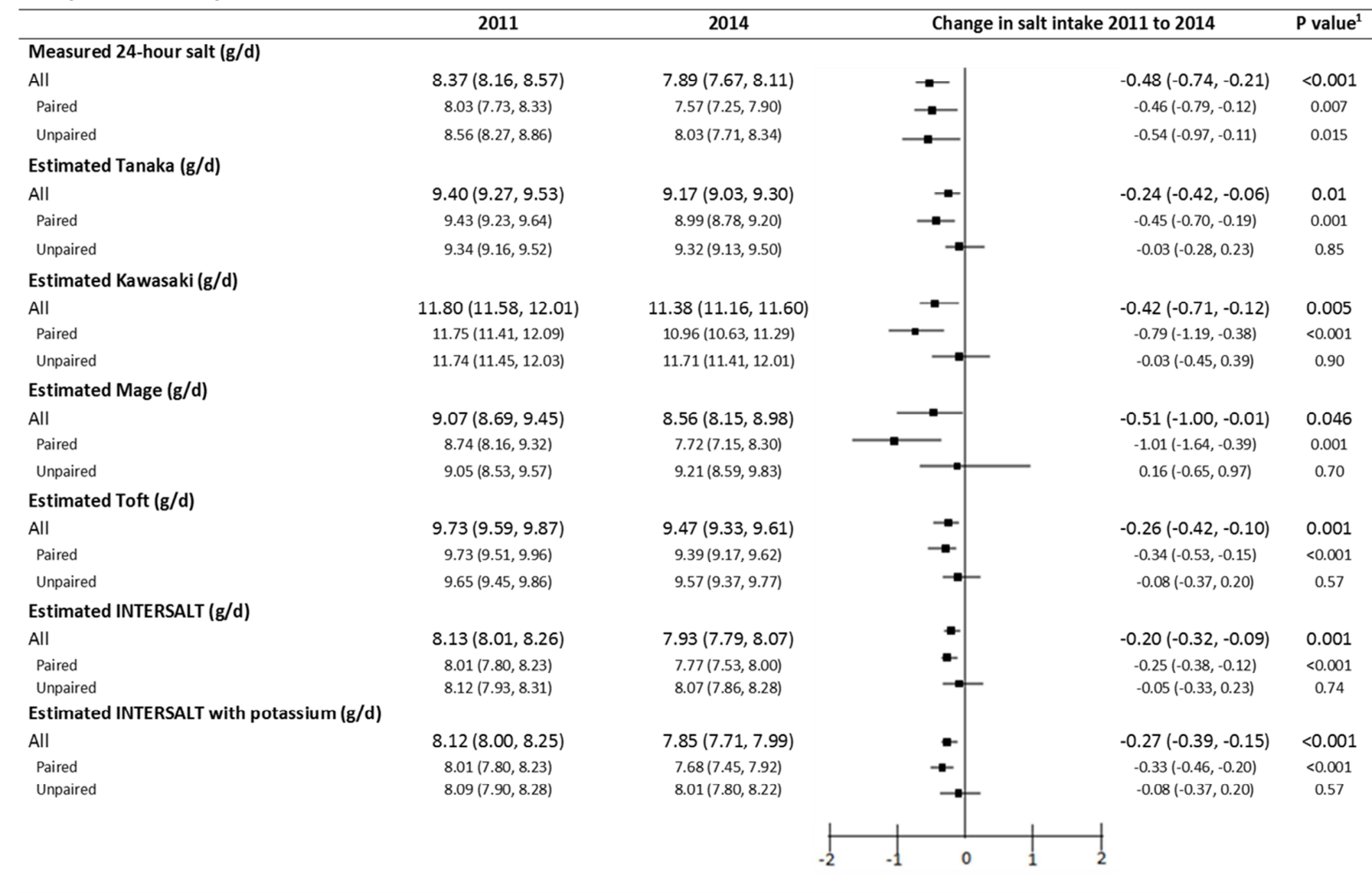
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Table 1: Participant characteristics

	n	2011	n	2014	<i>P value</i> ¹
Mean age (95% confidence interval), years					
All	1000	55 (55, 56)	1012	58 (58, 59)	<0.001
Paired	435	58 (57, 60)	435	61 (60, 63)	<0.001
Unpaired	565	55 (54, 56)	577	56 (55, 58)	0.12
Male n (%)					
All	1000	452 (45)	1012	445 (44)	-
Paired	435	201 (46)	435	201 (46)	-
Unpaired	565	251 (44)	577	244 (42)	0.47 ²
Mean weight (95% confidence interval), kg					
All	1000	79.3 (78.4, 80.2)	1012	79.4 (78.4, 80.3)	0.75
Paired	435	78.0 (76.4, 79.5)	435	77.9 (76.3, 79.5)	0.87
Unpaired	565	79.2 (77.8, 80.7)	577	80.5 (78.9, 82.2)	0.24
Mean BMI (95% confidence interval), kg/m²					
All	1000	28.1 (27.8, 28.3)	1012	28.2 (27.8, 28.5)	0.25
Paired	435	27.4 (26.9, 27.9)	435	27.4 (26.9, 27.9)	0.86
Unpaired	565	28.0 (27.6, 28.5)	577	28.8 (28.2, 29.3)	0.03

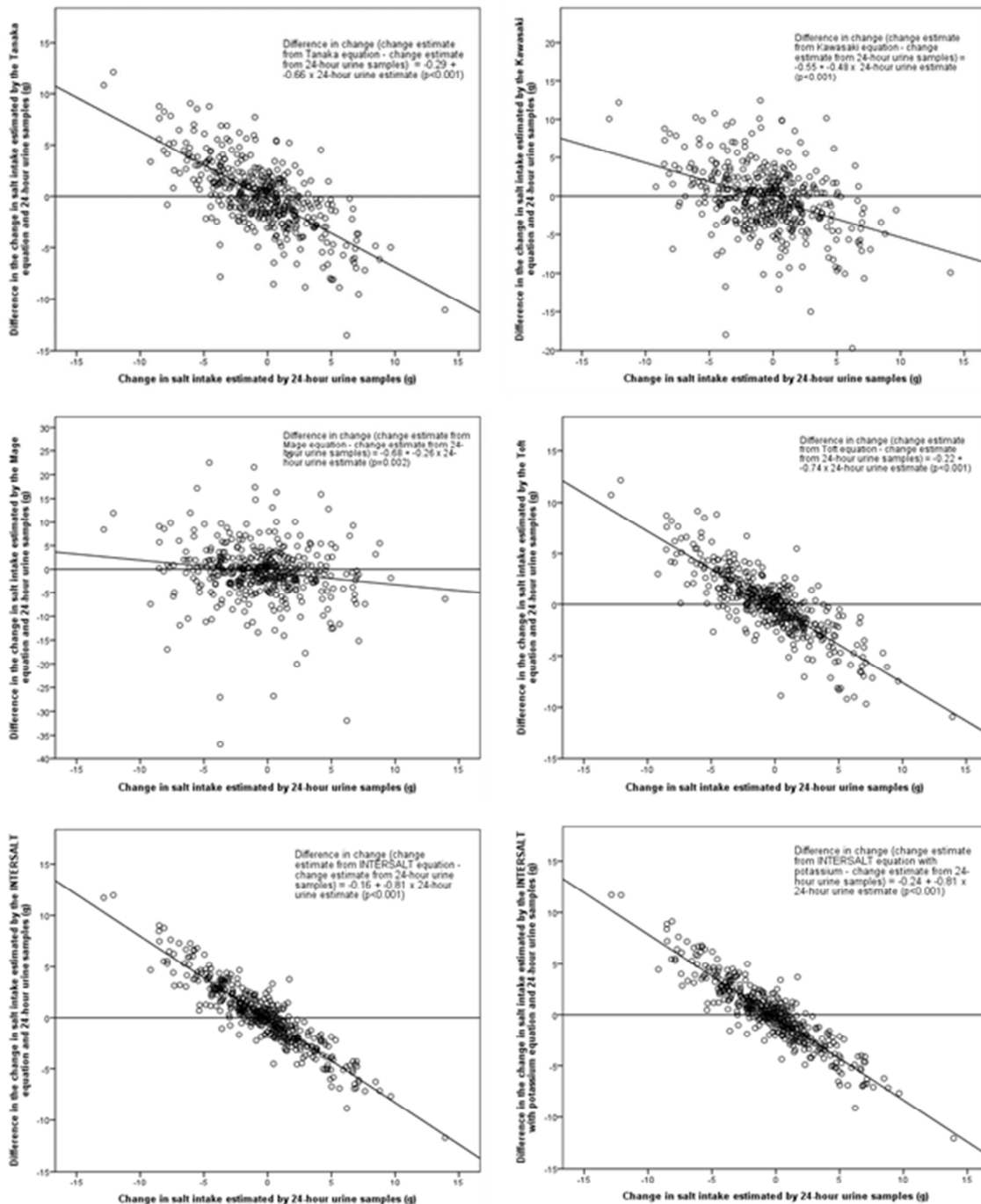
¹Mixed effect modelling for 2014 vs. 2011; ²Pearson Chi-Square test for 2014 vs. 2011

Figure 1: Change in mean daily population salt intake (g/d) from 2011 to 2014 measured using 24-hour urine collections and estimated from spot urine samples



Data presented as mean (95% confidence interval); ¹Mixed effect modelling for 2014 vs. 2011; Whole cohort: 2011 n=1000, 2014 n=1012; Paired analysis: 2011 & 2014 n=435; Unpaired analysis: 2011 n=565, 2014 n=577

Figure 2: The difference between the change in mean population salt intake estimated from 24-hour and spot urine samples plotted against the change in mean population salt intake measured using 24-hour samples



Includes the paired data only (n=435)