

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.



Reducing Salt in Meals

by Susan Figaro Grace, MEd, RD, CWC

Sodium intake in children and adolescents is high, comparable to that in adults. Higher sodium intake in children and adolescents is associated with higher blood pressure, which is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke among adults.

The school lunch program is addressing the need to reduce the sodium content of foods served to students. Parents can also do their part in helping to keep their families sodium intake in check.

The recommended level of sodium per day is:

 **2300**
milligrams

For special populations that include children who are African American and children who have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, the sodium requirement is:

 **1500**
milligrams

The majority of sodium comes from processed foods. Some of children's favorite foods contain significant amounts of sodium, such as hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, chicken fingers, canned soups, pizza, breads, cold cuts and cured meats. Try the following tips to help reduce the amount of sodium in your family's diet:

When grocery shopping...

At the grocery store, read food labels and compare the sodium amount in different products, then choose the options with the lowest amounts of sodium. Choose packaged foods that are labeled "**low sodium**" or "**no added salt**".

When dining out...

Before going out to eat, look at the restaurant's website and review the nutrition information for their menu items. **A meal should be about 600 milligrams of sodium or less.** If you are unable to look over the nutrition information ahead of time ask the server whether any of their meals are lower in sodium. Plain, lean meats, fruits, and vegetables are often lower in sodium. Foods items that are breaded, fried or in a broth, cream or cheese sauce are often higher in sodium.

When cooking at home...

At home, **use fresh unprocessed foods.** Flavor your meals with spices that are low in sodium, such as fresh or dried herbs like:

- Garlic
- Garlic powder
- Onion
- Onion powder
- Basil
- Parsley
- Pepper
- Chives
- Oregano
- Thyme
- Mint
- Cinnamon
- Nutmeg

Studies suggest infants' and childrens' preference for sodium is shaped by dietary exposure, so the less sodium children consume, the less they want. Parents can model healthy eating, which includes eating less processed foods and not adding more salt when cooking or at the table.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/>