

Bread, cereal drive UK children's high salt diet

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Children in London eat an unhealthy amount of salt on a daily basis—with much of it coming from breads and cereals, according to new research in the American Heart Association journal *Hypertension*.

In this London study—so far the largest to measure [salt intake](#) in U.K. youth—teens in particular ate more salt each day than is recommended for adults. Cereal- and bread-based products accounted for more than a third, 36 percent, of the salt in children's diets.

"We know that salt starts increasing the risk of high [blood pressure](#) in children starting at age one," said Graham MacGregor, M.D., study

author and professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, Barts and The London School of Medicine & Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London. "There needs to be a much greater effort to reduce salt in foods."

Researchers analyzed 24-hour urine samples of 340 children. This is considered the gold standard of measuring salt consumption. Participants or their parents also kept a detailed food diary and snapped photos of all foods and beverages consumed before they started eating as well as the leftovers when they finished. The study found:

- 5 and 6 year olds consumed 3.75 grams of salt daily.
- 8 and 9 year olds consumed 4.72 grams of salt daily.
- 13 to 17 year olds consumed 7.55 grams of salt daily.
- Boys tended to have higher salt intake than girls, particularly in the older and younger groups – about 1 gram higher per day in 5-6 yr olds, and 2 ½ grams per day higher in 13-17 year olds.
- In addition to the 36 percent of salt from breads and cereals, meat products provided 19 percent while dairy products accounted for 11 percent.

In the U.K., adults are advised to eat no more than 6 grams of salt daily. In the U.S. the American Heart Association recommends adults and children eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium, which is equal to 3.7 grams (a little less than a teaspoon) of salt.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 73 percent to 93 percent of U.S. children ages 1 to 18 consume too much sodium.

The large amount of salt the children ate was seen despite a nationwide salt reduction program in the U.K., which is cutting the amount of salt major food companies include in supermarket and restaurant foods.

"While salt intake in children wasn't measured prior to the U.K.'s salt-reduction campaign, the salt intake in adults has fallen 15 percent in six years," he said. "So, that policy is working, but it's not working fast enough. We need to do more and the U.S. needs a similar program," as children eat the same brands of processed foods and fast foods in both countries, MacGregor said.

Excessive [salt consumption](#) is one of the major factors contributing to [high blood pressure](#) which can lead to heart disease and stroke. Earlier studies have shown that kids with high sodium diets are about 40 percent more likely to have elevated blood pressure than kids who have lower sodium diets.

MacGregor said the study was conducted because there is very little information on exactly how much salt kids eat and what salty foods they are eating, information he said is necessary before designing an effective salt-reduction plan for kids.

"It is very difficult for parents to reduce [children's salt](#) intake unless they avoid packaged and restaurant foods and prepare each meal from scratch using fresh, natural ingredients," MacGregor said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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