

Everyday foods pushing the salt intake of toddlers to excessive levels

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Associate Professor Karen Campbell (right) discusses salt in infant's diet.

More than half of Australian toddlers have excessive salt intakes putting them at risk of high blood pressure, stroke and coronary heart disease in later life.

Researchers with Deakin University's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research (C-PAN) studied the diets of around 300 children at nine months of age and again at 18 months. They found that at 18 months 54 per cent had salt intakes higher than the recommended upper level, with everyday foods such as bread, cheese, breakfast cereal, soup, processed meats and yeast extract spreads the main sources of salt.

C-PAN's Associate Professor Karen Campbell said it was concerning to see young children consuming such high salt diets.

"Parents naturally want to do the best by their children, however because salt is added to many of our daily basic foods, they are unintentionally feeding them diets too high in salt," Associate Professor Campbell said.

"This is worrying because too much salt can increase blood pressure, even at a young age. High salt diets early in life can set children on a lifetime trajectory of raised [blood pressure](#), increasing their risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease as adults. After reducing smoking, reductions in our salt intake are likely to be the most effective way to reduce heart disease across the population.

"It is also worrying because we know that taste preferences are set early in life; so if you learn to like and prefer salty foods when you are young, you will continue to like and prefer them as an adult, adding to your risk of [high blood pressure](#)."

The researchers found that mean salt intakes increased from 1.2 grams (1/4 teaspoon) at nine months, to 2.7grams (1/2 teaspoon) at 18 months, with 54 per cent of 18 month-olds consuming more than the upper level of 2.5 grams of salt per day recommended for one to three year-olds by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council. The results also revealed that the foods responsible for children's salt intakes were the same foods known to contribute to high salt intakes in adults;

bread, cheese, breakfast cereal, soup, processed meat and yeast extract spreads.

Associate Professor Campbell said that the findings highlight the need to cut the level of salt in every day foods.

"These findings, that most children's salt intakes are high and that the lion's share of the salt comes 'hidden' in everyday family foods, highlight the essential role governments and the food industry must play to reduce salt across the board," Associate Professor Campbell said

"While some food manufacturers in Australia are actively working to reduce the salt in their products, there is still much room for improvement. Evidence from the UK, where more than 80 food groups have nominated sodium reduction targets, shows there has been a seven per cent reduction in sodium in the food supply overall. This tells us that lowering salt across the whole food supply is achievable."

Associate Professor Campbell said knowing the major sources of salt in [young children's](#) diets also guides parents in providing a lower salt diet. She recommends these six simple ways to reduce our children's salt intakes:

- Swap high salt breakfast cereals for low salt cereal that has less than 300mg of sodium/100g (refer to the nutrition information panel on the product);
- Swap high salt breads for lower salt bread that has less than 400mg of sodium/100g(refer to the nutrition information panel on the product);
- Swap processed cheese slices for cheddar cheese;
- Swap processed meats like sausages or ham/chicken slices for fresh meats like grilled or roasted meats/chicken/fish;
- Swap high salt yeast and cheese spreads on breads and biscuits

for low salt toppings like no added salt peanut butter, tomato, avocado, or cooked lean meats/chicken/fish;

- Swap high salt bread or biscuit based snacks for snacks of fresh fruits and vegetables which are naturally low in [salt](#).

The results of the study are published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

More information: Karen J. Campbell, Gilly Hendrie, Caryl Nowson, Carley A. Grimes, Malcolm Riley, Sandrine Lioret, Sarah A. McNaughton, "Sources and Correlates of Sodium Consumption in the First 2 Years of Life," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, Available online 8 July 2014, ISSN 2212-2672, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.04.028](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.04.028).

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