

# Nine of 10 American kids eat too much salt, CDC says

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Almost half of daily intake comes from the 10 foods they eat most.

(HealthDay)—Nine out of 10 American kids eat more salt than they should, raising their lifelong risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, a new federal government report shows.

On average, kids aged 6 to 18 eat 3,300 milligrams of sodium a day, even before salt is added at the table, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. Current dietary guidelines recommend that children eat less than 2,300 milligrams per day.

These high salt consumption levels are already affecting kids' health, said CDC Deputy Principal Director Ileana Arias.

"One in six children already has raised blood pressure, which can result

in [high blood pressure](#) in adulthood, as we know a major cause of [heart disease](#) and stroke," Arias said. "This is incredibly concerning to us."

About 43 percent of the salt ingested by children comes from the 10 foods they eat most often, the CDC found.

These foods include pizza, bread and rolls, cold cuts and cured meats, savory snacks, sandwiches, cheese, chicken patties and nuggets, pasta dishes, Mexican dishes and soups.

"Some of these foods may not taste salty but they are top contributors because they do have significant sodium content, and children eat a lot of them," Arias said.

All this salt not only harms a child's immediate health, but can also shape their future dietary habits.

"We know that the taste for salt is established through diet at a young age," Arias said. "Not only are children eating too much sodium, they are establishing a high threshold or taste for salt beyond childhood."

One expert agreed that the long-term effects are worrisome.

"Though kids do not have the same short-term risks from high-salt diets that adults do, as with all aspects of childhood nutrition, the foods our children eat now affect the choices they will go on to make as adults," said Dr. Erica Brody, a pediatrician in the department of pediatrics at the Kravis Children's Hospital at Mount Sinai in New York City. "This includes excessive sugars, fats and, of course, salt as well."

The findings may lead some parents to yank the salt shaker from the dining room table, but that's only part of the problem, Arias said.

Most sodium is already in [food](#) before it is purchased or ordered, the researchers added. Approximately 65 percent comes tucked inside store foods, 13 percent from fast food and pizza restaurant foods, and 9 percent from school cafeteria foods.

Parents can help their kids by reading nutrition labels in the supermarket and asking for nutrition information at restaurants, Arias said.

"By paying attention to nutrition labels, you can easily reduce the amount of sodium you're eating every day," she said.

Families can also serve more fresh fruits and vegetables, and by preparing foods using less salt, Arias said.

Federal officials also have called on the food industry to help reduce salt levels in food. Fast food chain Taco Bell has committed to reduce salt by 20 percent in its offerings, and food manufacturing giant ConAgra reports that it has reduced sodium in its products by 20 percent, Arias said.

New national nutrition standards for school cafeterias also should help, as they are expected to reduce the salt in school meals by 25 percent to 50 percent by 2022, the CDC report stated.

If that happens, [salt intake](#) among school-aged kids could drop 220 milligrams to 420 milligrams on days they eat cafeteria meals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken the lead on this by reducing the salt in foods the agency provides directly to schools, said Kevin Concannon, USDA undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services.

"We now offer a variety of no-salt-added, lower-sodium options to help

schools prepare healthier meals," he said. "Two-thirds of the products offered through the USDA Foods now to schools have no [salt](#) added in their formulations."

Schools and school districts also can implement food purchasing policies and standards that reduce sodium in foods and put lower-sodium alternatives in vending machines, school stores and cafeterias, the CDC report said.

The study authors drew their conclusions using data from more than 2,000 [children](#) who participated in the CDC's 2009-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

**More information:** Visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for more on salt.

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