

Kids and sodium: Serious risks, alarming realities

November 9 2022, by Joel Streed



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When it comes to sodium intake among adults, the general consensus is that high consumption will increase risk of hypertension and stroke. According to the 2020–2025 Dietary Guideline for Americans, 45% of

people 18 and older are living with hypertension. Hypertension is a preventable risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Does a high sodium intake pose the same risks for children and adolescents as it does for adults?

Children and adolescents, ages 2–18, develop dietary patterns that tend to carry on through adulthood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 9 in 10 children consume more sodium than recommended. The main source of excess sodium is processed foods.

Roughly 1 in 6 children have [high blood pressure](#) during childhood, which remains a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

Americans consume too much salt

Table salt, or [sodium chloride](#), consists of roughly 40% sodium and 60% chloride. In the U.S., approximately 90% of sodium consumption comes from sodium chloride.

Within the U.S. diet, the [average person](#) consumes salt:

- From processed and prepared foods—77%
- From [natural sources](#)—12%
- Adding while eating—6%
- Adding during cooking—5%

One teaspoon of salt equals 2,300 milligrams of sodium.

Daily recommended sodium intake guidelines for children and adolescents are:

- Ages 1–3—Less than 1,200 milligrams
- Ages 4–8—Less than 1,500 milligrams
- Ages 9–13—Less than 1,800 milligrams
- Ages 14–18—2,300 milligrams

One [fast food](#) kid's meal can easily exceed 1,500 milligrams of sodium.

Concerning statistics

According to the 2015–2016 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey:

- Of surveyed children and adolescents, 90% exceeded the recommended sodium level for their age.
- The average sodium intake was 3,393 milligrams per day, with a range of 2,000–5,000 milligrams per day.
- High school-aged students consumed roughly 400–800 milligrams more than younger school-aged kids.
- 50% of sodium intake came from pizza, Mexican dishes, sandwiches—including burgers—cold cuts, soups, snacks and cheese.
- Girls consumed significantly less sodium than boys.
- Of total daily sodium consumption, 58% came from store-bought foods, 16% from fast food/restaurants and 10% from school cafeterias.

Sodium reduction is a must

The statistics are alarming, making reducing sodium intake among children and teens crucial. Children and adolescents' dietary habits often resemble those of their household and their environment. Taste preferences formed during childhood often carry into adulthood.

Because much of the sodium intake comes from processed foods and restaurant foods, lowering sodium content across the [food supply](#) would contribute to significantly less sodium intake among children, teens and adults.

Cooking meals at home also can significantly reduce [sodium intake](#), specifically with the use of spices and herbs to replace sodium and enhance flavor. Reading nutrition facts labels of boxed, bagged and canned foods is important. Look for products that contain less than 140–200 milligrams of sodium per serving. At each meal, try to have only one product that comes from a bag, box or can.

Lastly, [grocery shopping](#), cooking and eating together with children gives parents and guardians the opportunity to model healthy dietary choices to create lifelong habits.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

Citation: Kids and sodium: Serious risks, alarming realities (2022, November 9) retrieved 30 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-kids-sodium-alarming-realities.html>

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