

Salt intake and the health of your children



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Children should eat less salt than adults but most children in the UK are probably consuming as much as, or even more than adults. Children need less than one gram of salt a day to stay healthy and this is easily obtained from a normal healthy, varied diet. However, they can easily exceed the recommended maximum upper daily limit, particularly if their diet includes processed or snack foods.

How salt can affect the health of your child

Blood Pressure

A high salt intake results in higher blood pressure in children as well as adults. The higher the blood pressure in childhood, the higher it will be in adult-hood and high blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Reducing salt intake by around 2.5g a day can reduce the risk of having a stroke or a heart attack in later life by a quarter.

Eating too much salt in childhood can also lead to a preference for salty foods and therefore an increased risk of heart disease or stroke as an adult.

Bone Demineralisation and Osteoporosis

A high salt intake also causes calcium loss from bones leading to thinning of the bones. Thin bones are more fragile and as we get older this results in more fractures (broken bones) which take longer to heal. In teenagers, particularly girls, a high salt intake could lead to bones not reaching their maximum strength and because of this, an increased risk of osteoporosis in later life.

Stomach Cancer

Comparison of different countries around the world shows a close relationship between the amount of salt eaten in the diet and the number of people who develop stomach cancer.

Asthma

A high salt intake has been shown to aggravate the symptoms of asthma. If your child suffers from asthma, reducing their salt intake may be beneficial in combination with the other treatments for asthma.

Recommended maximum salt intake for children

Age	Maximum Salt Intake
0 - 6 months	< 1g / day
6 - 12 months	1g / day
1 - 3 years	2g / day
4 - 6 years	3g / day
7 - 10 years	5g / day
11 years and above	6g / day

How much salt should children have?

When cooking for children of any age do not add salt to their food and discourage addition of salt at the table. Habits formed in childhood continue through to adulthood so give your children a good start by reducing their salt intake today.

Babies

Babies only need very small amounts of salt, and their kidneys are too immature to cope with any added salt. Therefore **salt should never be added** to any food that is cooked for your baby. Breast milk naturally meets all of a baby's nutritional requirements, including a tiny amount of salt, and infant formula is specially formulated to contain the right amount of salt. It is always important to make up formula milk correctly to the manufacturers instructions.

Weaning

During weaning, no salt should be added to any foods. Weaning products do not have any added salt and on tasting them you may find they taste bland, but **do not add any salt.** If you are making your own weaning foods **do not add any salt** during preparation and limit the amount of high salt foods such as cheese, ham and sausages. Avoid using processed foods that are not made specifically for babies such as cooking sauces and adult breakfast cereals as these can be high in added salt.



Children

Once your child is eating the same foods as the rest of the family it is important to **continue not adding any salt to their food.** This will also benefit the rest of the family! It is at this point that children's salt intake tends to increase dramatically due to eating higher salt foods.

Homemade meals cooked using fresh ingredients are naturally lower in salt than convenience meals and processed food. Limit foods that are high in salt, and always check nutritional information, even on products aimed at children, and choose those with less salt. A low salt diet throughout childhood will help prevent children developing a taste for salty foods and reduce the likelihood of them eating a diet high in salt during adulthood.

Teenagers

Teenagers should be warned to limit their consumption of salty savoury and sweet snacks such as crisps, chips, supermarket bought biscuits and cake slices; and take-away foods such as chicken nuggets, pizza and burgers which can greatly increase their salt intake.

Which foods are high in salt?

Most of the salt we eat (75-80%) is hidden in processed and convenience foods, and the rest comes from salt added during cooking and any salt added at the table. Additionally, children are more likely to snack on sweet and savoury processed foods, snacks and takeaways high in salt.

The foods that contribute the most salt to children's diets are:

Foods that are often high in salt - cut down on these foods

Anchovies	Ham	Salted and dry roasted nuts
Bacon	Noodle snacks pots	Salt fish
Cheese	Olives	Sausages
Chips (if salt added)	Pickles	Smoked meat and fish
Coated chicken e.g. nuggets	Potato snacks e.g. Hula Hoops	Soy sauce
Corn snacks e.g. Wotsits	Prawns	Stock cubes and bouillon
Gravy granules	Salami	Yeast extract e.g. Marmite

Foods where some brands are high in salt - check the label

Baked beans	Cooking sauces	Ready meals
Biscuits	Crisps	Soup
Burgers	Filled pasta	Sandwiches
Breakfast cereals	Pasta sauces	Sausages
Bread and bread products*	Pizza	Tinned pasta
Cakes and pastries	Potato croquettes	Tomato Ketchup

*bread provides a fifth of our salt intake

Foods which are lower in salt - eat more of these

Breakfast cereals** e.g. Shredded Wheat	Fruit and Vegetables (dried, fresh, frozen and tinned)***	Plain cottage cheese
Couscous	Homemade bread**	Plain popcorn
Eggs	Homemade sauces**	Porridge oats
Emmental	Homemade soup**	Pulses (peas, beans, lentils)***
Fresh fish	Mozzarella	Ricotta
Fresh meat and poultry	Pasta and Rice	Seeds
Fromage frais	Plain cheese spreads	Unsalted nuts
		Yogurt

** with no added salt ***choose tinned products with no added salt

A typical days diet for a child aged between 7 and 10 years

Breakfast	Portion size	Salt per portion
Multigrain hoops with semi-skimmed milk	1 x 30g bowl + 125mls milk	0.5g
Snack: Chocolate digestive biscuit	2 biscuits	0.5g
Lunch		
Homemade ham and cheddar cheese sandwich	140g	2.5g
Ready salted crisps	25g (multi-pack bag)	0.4g
Sliced apple	1 x medium	trace
Snack: Bread and peanut butter	1 slice wholemeal bread with 15g peanut butter	0.6g
Evening Meal		
Sausages	2 sausages	1.6g
Baked beans	Half a small tin (105g)	1.0g
Oven chips	100g	0.3g
Ice cream with sliced banana	1 scoop ice cream with half a medium banana	0.1g
Drinking chocolate	200mls semi-skimmed milk (1 mug) and 18g drinking chocolate (3 heaped spoonfuls)	0.5g
	Total salt	8g

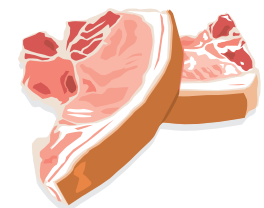
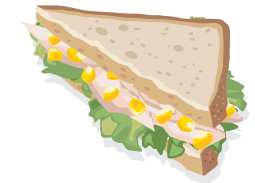
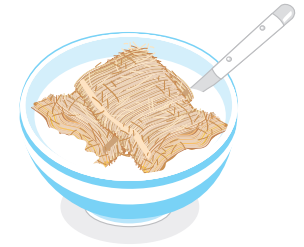
This typical diet shows how easily a child's salt intake can add up through the day. The diet contains **3g more salt than a child aged 7-10 should eat in one day (5g)**.

- The main high salt foods in this day's diet are the **ham and cheese sandwich, sausages and baked beans**.
- The **breakfast cereal, crisps and the bread and peanut butter snack** also significantly contribute to the salt content.

How can I reduce the amount of salt?

The salt for this day could be reduced by:

- Choosing a breakfast cereal with less salt. Check product labels and choose those with no added salt e.g. honey nut shredded wheat or cereals with 0.3g of salt per portion or less (saving approximately 0.2g).
- Replace the chocolate biscuits with a fun size chocolate bar (saving 0.4g).
- Choosing a lower salt bread and sandwich filling e.g. tuna, fresh chicken or egg mayonnaise with lots of fresh salad (saving approximately 0.3g).
- Making a homemade 'no added salt' pasta salad as an alternative to sandwiches at lunch time.
- Swapping crisps for fresh crunchy carrot and pepper sticks (saving approximately 0.4g).
- Replacing sausages with a lower salt alternative such as freshly cooked lean meat or fish, or a homemade burger (saving approximately 1.4g).
- Swapping baked beans for lightly cooked, frozen or fresh vegetables e.g. peas, broccoli, green beans or carrots (saving approximately 1g).



These small changes would make a huge difference **reducing the day's intake by approximately 3.6g** bringing the **total salt content down to an approximate total of 4.4g**. This is **below the maximum recommended intake** of 5g per day for a child aged between 7 and 10 years.

Understanding food labels

Find out if the food you are buying your children is high in salt by looking at the nutritional information on the food label. By checking food labels, you can compare different brands, varieties and flavours of products and choose those that are lower in salt. Adding up the amount of salt in each product will also give you an idea of how much salt your child is eating throughout the day.

As a general rule:

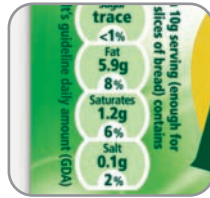
Foods high in salt have more than **1.5g salt / 100g**.
(or 0.6g sodium / 100g)

Foods low in salt have less than **0.3g salt / 100g**.
(or 0.1g sodium / 100g)

- Some food labels may only state the sodium content. To convert the sodium content of a product into the salt content, multiply sodium by 2.5.
- Traffic light labelling** makes it easier to see at a glance if a product is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in nutrients including salt. The amount of salt in grams per serving is also stated. Choose more greens and ambers, and fewer reds.
- Guideline Daily Amounts** or GDAs are general guidelines for the average recommended intake of certain

Per serving	
FAT	7.7g
SATURATES	2.0g
SUGAR	42.2g
SALT	2.4g
■ HIGH ■ MEDIUM ■ LOW	

nutrients including salt. Products using this system will state what percentage they contribute to the total GDA. Check that the GDA's given are for **children** and not adults. Remember the GDA for salt is a **maximum and not a target**.



- Where salt is given per 100g, remember to think about how much of the product your child will be eating, i.e. whether this is more or less than 100g. Look at the weight of the packet as a guide.
- Where salt is given per portion, **check the portion size** stated on the packaging and decide if this is similar to how much of the product your child will actually be consuming. For example, a label may state that a quarter of the product is one portion size but realistically your child may actually eat the whole product.
- Look out for 'no added salt' or 'reduced salt' versions of foods such as baked beans, tinned vegetables and some cooking sauces.

Practical ways to reduce your child's salt intake

Many processed foods are high in salt so try to cut down on these and switch to more fresh foods such as fish, chicken, meat, fruit and vegetables or check the label and choose a lower salt option. Most children (and adults) eat some processed or convenience foods on most days so ... **Be Salt Aware**...

- Check food labels for salt to compare products, brands and varieties and choose lower salt options
- Limit foods high in salt to once a day
- Keep takeaways and fast food such as burgers, fried chicken and pizza to an occasional treat
- Swap salty snacks for lower salt alternatives such as fruit, yogurt or unsalted nuts and popcorn
- Avoid ketchup, soy sauce, mustard, pickles and mayonnaise – these can all be high in salt
- Make your own sandwiches using lower salt fillings such as tuna or fresh chicken and lots of salad
- Vary packed lunches to include lower salt products such as a boiled egg with a salad, raw vegetable sticks and fresh fruit pieces or mixed fruit salad
- Don't add salt to your children's food or during cooking and discourage adding salt at the table
- High salt flavour enhancers include stock cubes, gravy granules and soy sauce so choose lower salt versions
- Use fresh, frozen or dried herbs, spices, chilli, garlic, pepper, vinegar, lemon or lime juice to add flavour instead

For further information on salt, cutting down your salt intake and for low salt sandwich fillings, lunch box ideas and recipes visit www.actiononsalt.org.uk/consumers

Health care professionals: to download or order multiple copies of this leaflet or any other Consensus Action on Salt and Health leaflet or poster, visit the health professionals section of our website.



Consensus Action on Salt & Health

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