



DIETETICS

Salt in Children's Diets

By Ella Monaghan, OSCAR Care Group Dietitian

Most Australians, including children, eat more salt (sodium) than we should. It is essential that we have some salt in our diets for good health, but the amount we need is very small (1-2g) and that can be obtained from fruits and vegetables.

The maximum recommended amount of salt for children is:

1 – 3 years old = 1000mg/day (1g)

4–8 years old = 1400mg (3.5g)

9–13 years old = 2000mg (5g)

14–18 years old = 2300mg (6g)

What is salt?

Salt is a mineral formed from the two elements sodium & chloride. Salt is commonly added to food to improve the taste but is also used in food preservation. There are many types of salt – table salt, sea salt, rock salt & salt flakes to name a few.

What does it do?

The sodium in salt is an essential mineral for controlling water levels in the body. It is also needed for nerve and muscle function.



Reducing salt intake

It is commonly believed that only the elderly population need to reduce their salt intake due to the risk of high blood pressure (hypertension), which is a risk factor for heart disease.

However, reducing salt intake in children is important in order to reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure as this can occur at any age. As taste preferences are developed during childhood, it is important that good habits are set from a young age.

Did you know?

Your taste buds will adjust to having less salt in your diet within a few short weeks!

What foods contribute to children's salt intake?

Bread, breakfast cereal, soup and cheese are all significant sources of salt. However, these foods also provide essential nutrients so should not be excluded from a child's diet.

Processed meats, snack foods and many takeaway foods are often laden with salt and offer far less nutritional value, so aim to cut back on them.

Learn to be a label detective

The amount of salt in our diet, can add up very quickly over the duration of the day.

For example, 1 toasted ham & cheese sandwich contains nearly the entire day's limit of salt for a 4–8-year-old.

As commonly purchased foods such as breads and cereals contain added salt, it is important to read the nutritional information panel on the back of a product to select a food item lower in salt.

Salt content will be listed as 'sodium' on the nutritional information panel. To check how much salt is in a product look at the 100g column and select a product which contains less than 120mg sodium (salt) per 100g.



Toasted ham & Cheese Sandwich



2 slices of bread
0.8g of salt



1tsp butter
0.06g of salt



1 slice ham
1.16g of salt



2 slices of cheese
0.98g of salt

TOTAL = 3g of salt

7 ways to reduce salt in children's diets:

1. Prepare meals using fresh, unprocessed foods such as fruit and vegetables, fresh meat, fish and poultry.
2. Look at the food labels and select foods that contain less than 120mg sodium per 100g.
3. Cut back on intake of packaged snack foods. Limit to once per week or on special occasions. Choose snacks such as fresh fruit, reduced fat yoghurt and custard, unsalted nuts or popcorn, or vegetable sticks with homemade dip instead.
4. Avoid adding salt to your cooking and use lemon juice, garlic, vinegar, herbs and spices to flavour food instead.
5. Remove the saltshaker from the dinner table.
6. Cut back on take away and fast foods as they are generally high in salt.
7. Use gravy, soy sauce, stock cubes, bottled sauces and marinades sparingly.



For great healthy recipe ideas, please visit: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/recipes>

REFERENCES

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Need to establish a plan to reduce Children's salt intake?

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