



Queen Mary
University of London

**Be Salt
Aware**



Salt and the **health of your**
intake **children**

actiononsalt.org.uk



Action on Salt

Salt intake and the health of your children



Like the rest of us, most children in the UK are probably eating too much salt. Children need less than 1g of salt a day to stay healthy, and this is easily obtained from a healthy and varied diet. However, they can quickly exceed maximum limits, particularly if their diet includes processed foods. We should all keep an eye on our salt intakes, as too much can have serious effects on our health.

How salt can affect your child's health

Blood Pressure

A high salt diet results in higher blood pressure in children as well as adults. The higher the blood pressure in childhood, the higher it will be in adulthood, increasing the risk of developing health issues later in life, namely 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.

Osteoporosis

Building strong bones during childhood is very important in providing protection later in life. Calcium is particularly important for growing bones, however too much salt in the diet can cause calcium loss through bones, leading to bone thinning. Over time, this can result in fractures, which take longer to heal, and increases the risk of developing osteoporosis later in life, particularly for girls.

Obesity

Rates of obesity have increased worldwide in the past 30 years. More than a quarter of children are overweight or obese – 26% of boys and 29% of girls. Recent studies suggest salt may directly increase risk of obesity in both adults and children. It can also work indirectly as excess salt consumption makes you thirsty and increases the amount of fluid you drink. A third of drinks consumed by 4-18 year olds are sugar-sweetened beverages which have been shown to be related to childhood obesity.

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

UK recommended maximum intakes for children

How much salt should children have?



We are not born liking salty foods; this is developed over time as we get older and get used to salt in food. Children learn by example, so its important that when cooking for your family you do not add salt to their food, and remove salt shakers from the dinner table. Habits formed in childhood continue through to their adult years, so give your children the best start by reducing their salt intake today.

Babies

Babies only need a very small amount of salt for their bodies to function. Breast milk naturally meets all of a baby's nutritional requirements, including salt, and infant formula is specially formulated to contain the right nutrients. It is important not to add any salt to a baby's diet as their kidneys are not fully developed at this age, to cope with excess. Babies can get all the nutrients they need from breast milk or infant formula alone until they are around six months old.

Weaning

From six months of age you can now start introducing your baby to solid foods **without adding salt**. Weaning foods and purees may taste quite bland, as adults are used to more complex flavours, but to your babies they are completely new and exciting flavours and textures. If you are making your own baby foods, use simple ingredients without adding salt, and limit the amount of high salt you use e.g. cheese, ham and sausages. Avoid using processed foods that are not made specifically for babies e.g. cooking sauces and most breakfast cereals, as these can be high in added salt, and sugar too.

Children

Once your child is eating the same foods as the rest of the family, their salt intake is likely to increase dramatically due to them eating a wider variety of foods with higher salt content. Therefore, it is very important that you continue **not to add any salt to their food**, and if you get the children involved in the cooking, they are more likely to take an interest and eat more healthily.

Homemade meals cooked using fresh ingredients are naturally lower in salt than ready meals and processed food. Limit foods that are high in salt, and always check nutritional information on either front or back of pack, even on products aimed at children, and choose those with less salt. Children tend to snack a lot, which quickly increases their total salt intake; opt for lower salt snack options e.g. plain rice cakes, full fat plain yogurt and fruit.

Teenagers

Teenagers should be encouraged to limit their consumption of salty savoury and sweet snacks such as crisps, chips, biscuits and cake slices; and takeaway foods such as chicken nuggets, pizza and burgers which can greatly increase not just their salt intake, but fat and saturated fat too.

Which foods are high in salt?



Three quarters of the salt in our diet is hidden in every day 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 foods, snacks and takeaways high in salt.

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

Anchovies	Ham	Salted and dry roasted nuts
Bacon	Instant noodles and snack pots	Salt fish
Cheese	Olives	Sausages
Chips (if salt added)	Pickles and chutney	Smoked meat and fish
Coated chicken e.g. nuggets	Potato snacks e.g. Hula Hoops	Soy sauce
Corn snacks e.g. salted popcorn	Cooked prawns	Table sauces e.g. ketchup and mayonnaise
Gravy, stock cubes and bouillon	Salami	Yeast extract e.g. Marmite

*bread provides a fifth of our salt intake

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	Savoury pastries e.g. pies and sausage rolls	Tinned fish in oil

Foods which are lower in salt - eat more of these

Breakfast cereals** e.g. Weetabix	Fruit and vegetables (dried, fresh, frozen and tinned)***	Plain cottage cheese
Plain couscous	Homemade bread**	Porridge oats
Eggs	Homemade sauces**	Pulses (peas, beans, lentils)***
Lower salt cheeses e.g. Emmental, Mozzarella, Ricotta	Homemade soup**	Tinned fish in water
Fresh fish	Unsalted snacks e.g. popcorn, rice cakes and breadsticks	Seeds
Fresh meat and poultry	Plain pasta, rice and other grains	Unsalted nuts
Plain fromage frais	Plain cheese spreads	Yogurt

** with no added salt

***choose tinned products with no added salt



Understanding food labels

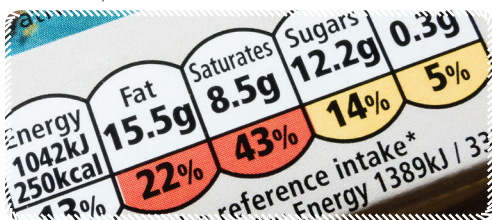
Not all foods are the same; some companies have made great efforts to reduce salt in their products. The best way to tell is by looking at the nutritional information on the food label: you can compare different brands, varieties and flavours of products and choose those that are lower in salt. Adding 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 more than 1.8g / portion.

Foods low in salt have less than 0.3g salt / 100g.

- Colour-coded 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.



- 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 for 'no added salt' or 'reduced salt' versions of foods such as baked beans, tinned vegetables and some cooking sauces.

Get Appy



There are many free health apps out there to help you make healthier food choices. FoodSwitch provides instant, easy to understand, colour-coded nutrition information about food and drink products. The app also offers healthier alternatives of foods within a similar category, and has a separate SaltSwitch filter specifically designed to help you find products with less salt. FoodSwitch is free to download from iTunes and Google Play.

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

This typical diet shows how easily a child's salt intake can add up in a 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.





Breakfast	Portion size	Salt per portion
Multigrain hoops with semi-skimmed milk	1 x 30g bowl + 125ml 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	1x 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








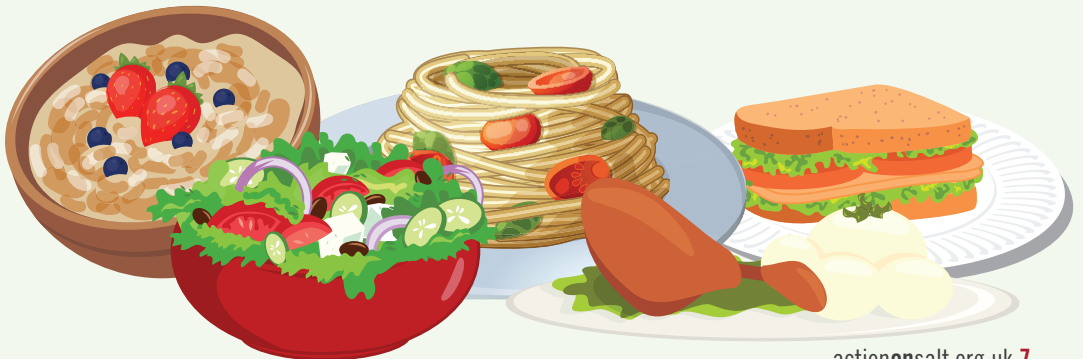
How can I reduce the amount of salt?

The salt for this day could be reduced by:

-  Choosing a breakfast cereal with less salt. Check nutrition labels and choose those with no added salt e.g. Weetabix or cereals with 0.3g of salt per portion or less (saving approximately 0.2g).
-  Replace the chocolate biscuits with half a toasted tea cake and some fruit (saving 0.3g).
-  Choosing a lower salt bread and sandwich filling e.g. 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 a lower salt variety, or 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 3.5g bringing the total salt content down to **4.5g**. This is below the maximum recommended intake of 5g per day for a child aged between 7 and 10 years.





Queen Mary
University of London

Practical ways to reduce your child's salt intake



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

- 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 at most
- 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
- Limit use of ketchup, barbecue sauce, mustard, pickles and mayonnaise – these can all be high in salt
- Make your own sandwiches using lower salt fillings such as mozzarella cheese, tomato and basil 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
- Don't add salt to your children's food or during cooking and discourage adding salt at the table
- Limit use of flavour enhancers that are high in salt e.g. gravy, stock cubes and soy sauce, and choose lower salt versions where possible
- Use fresh, frozen or dried herbs, spices, chilli, garlic, pepper, vinegar, lemon or lime juice to add flavour instead
- Have breaded/battered food no more than twice a week

Action on Salt

Questions? Email us on cash@qmul.ac.uk

For further information on salt, cutting down your salt intake and for low salt sandwich fillings, lunch box ideas and recipes visit

actiononsalt.org.uk

