



MEALTIME MEMO

NOVEMBER 2024

REDUCING SALT INTAKE



Early childhood is a critical time for developing taste preferences. The food eaten by children during this time can influence their eating habits for many years. One challenge is the allure of salty flavors. However, too much sodium or salt intake can pose health risks. This *Mealtime Memo* will demonstrate how to identify sodium in products and provide healthy food alternatives.

HOW MUCH SALT IS RECOMMENDED?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommends the following limits for daily sodium intake:

Age	Daily Salt Intake Limit
Children 1-3 years old	1,200 mg
Children 4-8 years old	1,500 mg
Children 9-13 years old	1,800 mg
Adults and children 14 years and older	2,300 mg



To put sodium intake limits into perspective, 2,300 mg of sodium is equal to only 1 teaspoon of table salt! Therefore, it may not be surprising that, on average, sodium intakes in the United States are much higher than recommended—at about 3,400 mg/day—more than double the amount the DGA recommends for children under the age of 9.

1 tsp of salt = 2,300 mg

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF TOO MUCH SALT



So, what does this mean? People with diets higher in salt may have an increased risk of developing high blood pressure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can raise the risk of heart attacks, stroke, and kidney disease. These health concerns affect not only adults but children too! Consuming less sodium can help reduce the risk of developing these health conditions.

SOURCES OF SODIUM

You may think, “I don’t add salt to my food, so I should be okay, right?” Not necessarily. Table salt is one source of sodium; however, processed foods are also significant contributors of sodium because salt is commonly added to preserve foods and extend shelf life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost half (48%) of the sodium in children’s diets comes from the following foods:

- Breads, rolls, and tortillas
- Burritos and tacos
- Cheese
- Deli/cured meats (luncheon/sandwich meat, ham, and sausage)
- Pizza
- Poultry (chicken patties, nuggets, and tenders)
- Sandwiches (hamburgers, hot dogs, and sub sandwiches)
- Snack foods (crackers, chips, pretzels/snack mix, and popcorn)
- Soup



Sodium is also found in these commonly eaten foods:

- Potato products (mashed potatoes, oven-baked fries, and tater tots)
- Ready-to-eat cereal
- Salad dressings (ranch, Italian, and French), mayonnaise, and soy/teriyaki sauce
- Tomato-based sauces and condiments (spaghetti sauce, marinara sauce, ketchup, and salsa)



Did you know a typical sandwich with two slices of bread, deli turkey, cheese, mustard, and lettuce can have over 1,500 mg of sodium? This is the daily limit of sodium intake for children under 8 years old! The ICN’s [Grab and Go Lesson: Strategies for Reducing Sodium](#) breaks this down and includes amounts of sodium in other commonly eaten foods.



Refer to the ICN’s worksheet, [Scoping Out Sodium In School Menus](#) for more information.

IDENTIFYING SODIUM IN FOOD PRODUCTS

Understanding how to identify and manage sodium is vital. Here are some practical tips:

- **Check Product Labels.** Look at the front of the package for claims that may mean lower-sodium products such as “Sodium- or Salt-Free,” “Very Low or Low Sodium,” “Reduced-Sodium,” or “No Salt Added/Unsalted.”
- **Read the Nutrition Facts Label.** It specifies how much sodium is in the product. Compare similar products and choose the one with lower sodium. Remember to check the serving sizes.



For more information, refer to the ICN’s worksheet, [Sodium Swaps: Utilizing Product Substitution](#).

SEASONINGS AND SPICE BLENDS

People often purchase high-sodium seasonings, such as garlic or onion salt and taco or chili seasoning packets, to flavor foods. Consider the ideas below to help reduce salt.

- Purchase low-sodium or sodium-free versions of seasonings.
- Replace garlic salt with chopped garlic, granulated garlic, or garlic powder.
- Replace onion salt with chopped onions, onion powder, or dried onions.
- Purchase or make your spice blends—spices and herbs with no added salt.

The Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition (CICN) provides four [posters](#) that illustrate methods for using spices and herbs: *Dried Spices*, *Dried Herbs*, *Fresh Herbs*, and *Spice Blends*.



ALLERGENS

Some purchased seasoning packets not only have more salt, but also, added ingredients, such as additives, preservatives, and artificial colors, and may also contain allergens. Some individuals may be sensitive to certain ingredients and, in some cases, experience an allergic reaction. For example, a taco seasoning packet may contain allergens such as wheat, soy, and milk.

NUTRITION FACTS LABELS

Let's look at sample Nutrition Facts labels and Ingredients lists for a taco seasoning packet and a taco seasoning recipe to compare the amounts of sodium and the number of ingredients.

Taco Seasoning Packet

Nutrition Facts	
9 servings per container	
Serving size	3 tsp (7.5g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	20
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 560mg	24%
Total Carbonydrate 0g	2%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 0g	0%
INGREDIENTS: MALTODEXTRIN, CHILI PEPPER, ONION POWDER, SPICE, SALT, YELLOW CORN FLOUR, CORN STARCH. CONTAINS LESS THAN 2% OF: SILICON DIOXIDE (ANTICAKING AGENT), SUNFLOWER OIL, SUGAR, CITRIC ACID, NATURAL FLAVOR, EXTRACTIVES OF PAPRIKA, WHEAT STARCH, WHEY, SOY FLOUR.	
CONTAINS: WHEAT, MILK, SOY	

Taco Seasoning Recipe

Nutrition Facts	
9 servings per container	
Serving size	3 tsp (7.5g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	25
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 40mg	2%
Total Carbonydrate 4g	1%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 0g	0%
INGREDIENTS: CHILI POWDER, GROUND CUMIN, ONION POWDER, PAPRIKA	

	Amount of Sodium	Number of Ingredients
Taco Seasoning Packet	560 mg	16
Taco Seasoning Recipe	40 mg	4

Let's go through this comparison.

- **Serving Size:** Both list the same serving size, so a direct comparison can be made without the need to adjust the size. If the serving sizes are not the same, you will need to calculate an adjusted serving to compare the products.
- **Sodium:** The Taco Seasoning Packet has **14 times** more sodium than the Taco Seasoning Recipe! (560 mg in the packet divided by 40 mg in the recipe.)
- **Ingredients:** The Taco Seasoning Packet has 16 ingredients compared to only 4 in the Taco Seasoning Recipe.
- **Allergen Information:** The Taco Seasoning Packet's ingredients contain three major allergens (wheat, soy, and milk), preventing you from serving this product to children with wheat, soy, or milk allergies.

Are you surprised by the difference? Making taco seasoning from scratch has fewer ingredients, contains less sodium, and doesn't take a long time to prepare. It's an easy switch.

TIPS FOR REDUCING SALT

Reduce sodium content when **making meals**.

- Make scratch-prepared meals when possible, which allows you to control the ingredients and seasoning.
- Choose whole, fresh foods that are often naturally low in sodium. Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains.
- Use as little salt in cooking as possible. You can cut at least half the salt from most recipes.
- Season foods with herbs, spices, salt-free seasonings, garlic, onions, peppers, and lemon or lime juice to add flavor.



Reduce sodium content when **purchasing foods**.

- Limit highly processed foods that tend to be higher in sodium.
- Compare product labels. Most canned foods (vegetables, soups, and sauces) have added salt.
 - Choose foods labeled "Salt-Free," "Low Sodium," or "No Salt Added."
 - Drain and rinse canned vegetables in a colander to reduce the salt content.
- Select lower-sodium cheeses. Natural cheeses, such as Swiss, Monterey Jack, cheddar, and fresh mozzarella are lower in sodium than processed cheeses, such as American or string cheese. Cottage cheese is a healthy option but choose the "No Added Salt" version.



RESOURCES



- Refer to the [Shaking It Up!](#) webpage for a variety of sodium resources.
- Team Nutrition's [Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children](#) includes a topic that discusses *Developing a Taste for Less Sodium*.
- [CACFP Healthy Cooking Videos](#) features a video on using herbs and spices.
- The USDA's MyPlate resource, [Be Salt Smart](#) provides tips to reduce salt intake.

MENU IDEAS

The following menu ideas provide a variety of colors and textures and are low in salt. One recipe contains multiple meal components listed in parentheses after the recipe.

Breakfast	Lunch/Supper	Snack
Scrambled Eggs Strawberries 1% Milk	Beef Taco Pie (Meat, Vegetable, Whole Grain) Green Grapes 1% Milk	Kohlrabi Sticks Hummus Water

RECIPES



- The [Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#) has USDA-standardized recipes for child care centers and family child care homes.
- The [Child Nutrition Recipe Box: New CACFP Lunch/Supper Recipes](#) has standardized recipes per age group (3–5 and 6–18 year-olds) and for 6, 25, and 50 servings.

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Suggested Reference Citation:
Institute of Child Nutrition. (2024). *Mealtime memo: Reducing salt intake*. University, MS: Author.

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