

LOWERING SODIUM IN SCHOOL FOODS



The recommended *maximum* sodium for school-age kids is between **1,900 and 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day**

Most children need *only* **1,500 mg of sodium per day**

The chart shows an example of what a middle-school lunch could look like before sodium standards were added, after changes in 2014, and when the next changes would occur in 2024. All menus meet calorie guidelines for middle schools.

OLD SCHOOL LUNCH	
No sodium standards specified	
Menu Item	Sodium (mg)
Cheeseburger	470
Pickle	280
Tator Tots	310
Ketchup	300
Cookie	40
Grapes	0
Low-fat Milk	110
Total	1,510

CURRENT SCHOOL LUNCH	
Sodium target: <1,360 mg	
Menu Item	Sodium (mg)
Hamburger	260
Pickle	280
Baked Beans (USDA Foods)	140
Carrot Sticks	40
Ranch Dip	270
Cookie	40
Grapes	0
Low-fat Milk	110
Total	1,140

TARGET 2: <1,035 MG (effective July 2024)	
Menu Item	Sodium (mg)
Hamburger	260
Baked Beans (USDA Foods)	140
Carrot Sticks	40
Ranch Dip	270
Cookie	40
Grapes	0
Low-fat Milk	110
Total	860

TIPS FROM SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS

The difference between 2014 and 2024 levels is 325 mg, similar to the amount saved by switching from a commercially-prepared version of baked beans to a USDA Foods version or from tator tots with ketchup to baby carrots with ranch dip.

Estimated Sodium Savings (mg) per Serving



Serve a **HAMBURGER** instead of a cheeseburger

210



Serve **CARROT STICKS** instead of a pickle

240



Swap **FROZEN** for canned vegetables

180



Serve **BABY CARROTS WITH RANCH DIP** instead of tator tots with ketchup

300



Use **MOZZARELLA** instead of American cheese

100



Switch from regular to **USDA FOODS VEGETARIAN BAKED BEANS**

295



Add **"NO SALT ADDED" DICED TOMATOES** to tomato soup

160



Serve an unbreaded instead of a **BREADED CHICKEN PATTY**

120



Add **HERBS AND SPICES** to rice instead of margarine or salt

220

Sodium content of menu items were estimated based on food composition data from manufacturers and USDA's National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Release 27. The American Heart Association acknowledges the Center for Science in the Public Interest for its contributions to the development of this infographic.

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Kids get **30%** of their daily sodium at lunch.

The recommended *maximum* sodium for school-age kids is between **1,900 and 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day**

Most children need *only* **1,500 mg of sodium per day**



BREAKFAST SODIUM REDUCTION TIMELINE

Grade Group	School Year 2014-2015 (mg)	School Year 2024-2025 (mg)
K-5	≤540	≤485
6-8	≤600	≤535
9-12	≤640	≤570



LUNCH SODIUM REDUCTION TIMELINE

Grade Group	School Year 2014-2015 (mg)	School Year 2024-2025 (mg)
K-5	≤1,230	≤935
6-8	≤1,360	≤1,035
9-12	≤1,420	≤1,080

References: CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Volume 63 (2014); Institute of Medicine Dietary Reference Intakes for Sodium (2005); USDA Final Rule: Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (2012)