

New study suggests salt has no effect on teens blood pressure, but potassium does

By ACSH Staff — April 29, 2015



US health officials have long warned that too much salt intake as a child can raise lifelong risk of high blood pressure. However, a [new study](#) ^[1] published in *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests it's actually potassium intake that parents should be aware of.

The study, led by Dr. Lynn L. Moore, an associate professor of medicine at Boston University, tracked the eating habits and blood pressure of over 2,000 nine and ten year old girls for up to ten years. The researchers assessed the effect of dietary sodium and potassium on systolic (the top number measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats) and diastolic (the bottom number measures the pressure in the arteries between heart beats) blood pressures throughout adolescence. Race, height, activity, television/video time, energy intake, and other dietary factors were adjusted for.

There was no evidence that higher sodium intakes (3000 to <4000 mg/day and ≥4000 mg/day compared to <2500 mg/day) had an adverse effect on adolescent blood pressure. Also, those consuming 3500 mg/day or more had generally lower diastolic blood pressures compared with those consuming less than 2500 mg/day. On the other hand, youngsters whose diets were high in potassium had lower blood pressure than those whose diets that were not.

Dr. Moore states: "The current official Dietary Guidelines for Americans say that salt intake after the age of 2 years should be limited to no more than 2,300 milligrams per day," [she said](#) ^[2]. "Actual intake levels are much higher, with most Americans consuming close to 3,500 milligrams per day." She added that the study results suggest that teenagers would get more long-term health benefits by eating more potassium-rich foods and not worrying about salt. High potassium foods include bananas, raisins, potatoes, spinach, guacamole, and many others. The recommended potassium intake is 4,700 mg/d.

Dr. Moore, however, made it clear that she isn't advising teens to consume all the salty foods they want. "I believe in everything in moderation," she said. A steady diet of high-salt snack foods that have lots of calories and few beneficial nutrients will not be healthy."

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava added this: Since the official adult guidelines for salt/sodium are draconian, and have been shown to be more likely to be [harmful than beneficial to public health](#) ^[3] (except among certain salt-sensitive populations), it is no surprise that these recommendations for children are similarly needlessly restrictive.

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[1] <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2272973>

[2] <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/articles/2015/04/27/study-challenges-salt-guidelines-for-kids>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/08/new-study-supports-change-dietary-sodium-targets-set-govt-agencies/>