

LOWERING SODIUM IN SCHOOL LUNCHES

The recommended maximum sodium intake for school-age kids is **between 1,500 and 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day.**

Most children only need **1,000 to 1,500 mg** of sodium per day depending on age.

The chart shows an example of what a middle-school lunch could look like before sodium standards were added and a four-stage reduction to align with the sodium dietary reference intake established by the National Academy of Medicine.

Old School Lunch

MENU ITEM	SODIUM
Cheeseburger	470mg
Pickle	280mg
Tater Tots	310mg
Ketchup	300mg
Cookie	40mg
Grapes	0mg
Low-Fat Milk	110mg
Total:	1510mg

Limit by SY 2027-28 <1,035 mg










MENU ITEM	SODIUM
Hamburger	260mg
Baked Beans (USDA Foods)	140mg
Carrot Sticks	40mg
Ranch Dip	270mg
Cookie	40mg
Grapes	0mg
Low-Fat Milk	110mg
Total:	860mg

Optimal Target <575 mg

MENU ITEM	SODIUM
Hamburger	260mg
Crunchy Baked Sweet Potatoes	35mg
Carrot Sticks	40mg
Hummus	72mg
Cookie	40mg
Grapes	0mg
Low-Fat Milk	110mg
Total:	557mg

TIPS FROM SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS

The difference between current and optimal targets is 460 mg. Here are a few swaps to help achieve this limit.

	Estimated Sodium Savings (mg) per Serving		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 tater 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 CHICKEN PATTY instead of a breaded patty	120
 Add HERBS AND SPICES to rice instead of margarine or salt	220		

This illustrates some quick swaps that could be done to decrease sodium in school meals. Since the sodium standard is weekly instead of a daily limit, it allows flexibility to offer a variety of foods—such as cheese—throughout the week.