

Highlights

What Do Consumers Really Think About Policies to Reduce Sodium?

June 2014

Two CDC studies published in 2014 suggest that U.S. consumers generally support government actions to reduce sodium in restaurant meals, manufactured food, and school meals.

Too much sodium can raise blood pressure. High blood pressure is also called hypertension. Most Americans, including children and adolescents, consume too much sodium, increasing the risk for hypertension and subsequent heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases. Most sodium in the American diet is already present in foods at the time of purchase, added by manufacturers and restaurants.

Many U.S. adult consumers support government action to keep restaurants and food manufacturers from putting too much salt in food, according to a new CDC study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

- Most consumers think it is a good idea for government to keep excess sodium out of quick-service restaurant meals (82%) and manufactured foods (56%). Almost half of consumers agreed it is a good idea to limit sodium in full-service restaurant meals (47%).
- There was generally higher support from groups at high risk for heart disease and stroke, such as blacks, older adults, and adults with less education or of lower socioeconomic status.



9 out of 10

90% of Americans support policies that lower sodium content of cafeteria foods in schools.



81%

81% of Americans support policies to limit sodium in quick-service restaurants (e.g., fast food).



56%

More than half of Americans support policies to limit sodium in manufactured foods.

Most U.S. adult consumers support policies to reduce sodium content of school meals, according to a new CDC study published in the *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*.

- 90% of U.S. adults support policies that lower sodium content of cafeteria foods in schools.
- Females, blacks, Hispanics, adults with high blood pressure, and those with lower incomes were even more likely to support such policies.

Opportunities for Action

Support consumers' interest by providing healthier options where they work and play.

- The wide backing of government action supports the Institute of Medicine's (IOM's) 2010 report *Strategies to Reduce Sodium Intake in the United States*, which calls for government to assist Americans in lowering their sodium intake through mandatory national standards to lower sodium in processed and restaurant foods.
- Consumer desire for more lower sodium options in manufactured and restaurant foods—especially among groups at high risk for hypertension—suggests a demand for public-private action, voluntary or otherwise, to help Americans lower their sodium intake.
- Reducing the sodium content in food gradually—not all at once—has been shown to help people consume less salt.
- Even for people without high blood pressure, gradual reductions in sodium intake can result in health benefits.



When restaurants and food manufacturers rethink how they prepare food and the ingredients they use, the healthier choice becomes the easier one for the customer.



Consumers can do their part by reading nutrition labels to find the lowest sodium options, replacing higher sodium ingredients with lower sodium ingredients, and using more fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned [no salt added]) when preparing meals.

Educate consumers to promote healthy changes to school meals.

- The public support for reducing sodium in school meals reinforces the IOM's 2010 recommendations to align school meal requirements with the *Dietary Guidelines*, including significantly reducing the amount of sodium in school meals.
- School nutrition professionals can capitalize on this strong support by educating and working with families, students, and community members to implement and support these changes.



Reduce.



Replace.



Reformulate.

Citations

Patel SM, Gunn JP, Merlo CL, Tong X, Cogswell ME. Consumer support for policies to reduce the sodium content in school cafeterias. *J Child Nutr Manag.* 2014;38(1).

Patel SM, Gunn JP, Tong X, Cogswell ME. Consumer sentiment on actions reducing sodium in processed and restaurant foods, *ConsumerStyles* 2010. *Am J Prev Med.* 2014;46(5):516–24.