

Even the experts are confused, so what hope do parents and practitioners have, asks dietician, chef and founder of Grub4Life, Nigel Denby...



*The majority of polled professionals miscalculated crucial levels of salts and fats*

**C**hildren under five are at risk of stomach cancer, asthma, obesity and kidney disease from incorrect levels of salts, sugars and fats in their diets. And, when health professionals were questioned in a recent report, a staggering majority were ignorant of the safe nutritional levels. Which begs the question – if the professionals don't know, how are mums, dads and carers meant to be able to feed their children properly?

The majority of polled professionals miscalculated crucial levels of salts and

fats and were unsure of the correct calorie intake required for under-fives. But an overwhelming majority called on the Government to issue guidelines on safe levels for all under-fives in the UK. Currently there are no minimum standards set for early years childcare, or any nutritional training for childcare staff. The current legislation assumes there is a nutritional 'common sense' amongst early years practitioners and children centres' kitchen staff, but if that 'common sense' isn't shared amongst the dietitians, what chance do they have?



**If you want to control how much sugar and salt and the types of fats children eat, you do need to cook more often from scratch**

NIGEL DENBY

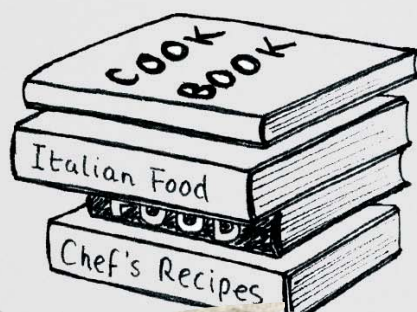
In terms of salt alone, the average under-five could be consuming six times the safe levels every single day. Children under three are recommended only 1g of salt per day, whilst 2g and 3g are considered safe for 1–3 year-olds and 4–6-year-olds respectively. For many, a daily packet of crisps is enough to put youngsters in the danger zone.

**The key findings of the report included:**

- 89% called for standards to be set for early years nutrition
- more than 8 out of 10 did not know the correct number of calories required by under-fives
- more than half didn't know the safe levels of salt for the under-fives
- 7 out of 10 respondents did not know the safe levels of fat for under-fives
- 60% were unaware of the correct



# MENUS



levels of sugar under-fives should have  
 this despite nearly half the respondents having children of their own.

The poll was conducted by trade magazine *Network Health Dietitian* and *Grub4Life.org.uk*, in February – and in the same the week that the University of Bristol delivered its findings that the wrong levels of salts and fats in the early years leads to irreparable reduction in a child's IQ in later life, reinforcing the gravity of the report's findings.

## Hidden dangers

I don't believe any parent or carer deliberately feeds their children a diet high in sugar, unhealthy fats and salt – but many of those I've talked to just don't realise that toddlers' nutritional needs are quite different from older children and adults.

There's massive confusion about which foods contain hidden nutritional nasties, too.



*75% of the salt in the UK diet comes from processed and convenience foods*



*Shop-bought cakes and biscuits often contain less healthy types of fat*

## A TYPICAL DAY

Even a 'healthy' home-cooked diet for an under-five can be loaded with salts. Consider the following:

Breakfast	Salt content
30g Kellogg's cornflakes with semi skimmed milk:	0.7g
1 slice of buttered toast	0.5g
<b>Mid morning</b>	
Cheese triangle (Dairylea)	0.3g
2 breadsticks	0.08g
<b>Lunch</b>	
Egg mayonnaise sandwich	1.9g
200g serving canned tomato soup	2.0g
Packet of cheese and onion supermarket brand crisps	1.3g
<b>Dinner</b>	
Roast chicken	0.25g
Instant gravy	1.3g
Ready-made stuffing	1.1g
Frozen Yorkshire pudding	0.5g
Frozen roast potatoes	1.3g
Boiled carrots and peas	0.01g
Ready-made apple pie	0.8g
Ready-made custard	0.3g
<b>Total for day:</b>	<b>11.26g</b>

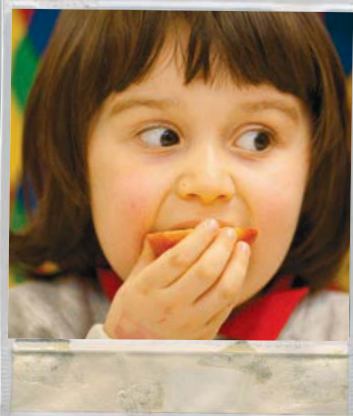
*6 times safe amount!*

Up to 75% of the salt in the UK diet comes from processed and convenience foods, not from the salt we add at the table or during cooking, fizzy drinks can contain up to seven teaspoons of sugar and shop-bought cakes and biscuits often contain less healthy types of fat.

However, with a little care, it is possible to avoid these danger areas.



# Diet do's and don't's



**SIMPLE STEPS TO GET YOUR EARLY YEARS FOOD OFFERING ON THE RIGHT TRACK...**



## DO'S

- ✓ choose canned vegetables in unsalted water – this can make a big saving and counts towards your five-a-day
- ✓ cut down on salty snacks like crisps, make them occasional treats once a week
- ✓ keep a watch on naturally salty foods like yeast extract. Two slices of toast and Marmite gives about 2g of salt even when thinly spread
- ✓ look at labels on bottled mineral water; some can contain high levels of salt
- ✓ choose reduced-salt products like stock cubes, gravy granules and baked beans; they're often over 25% lower in salt than regular varieties. Even better, make your own stock and gravy!
- ✓ make sure children have some foods which contain natural sugars – these include fruits, milk and dairy products, starchy carbohydrates like bread, cereals, rice, pasta and grains
- ✓ serve puddings to toddlers 2–3 times a week. But try and use less added sugar and sweeten recipes with dried and fresh fruits; you can cut sugar by around a third!
- ✓ use some butter, margarine or unsaturated oil when cooking – they contain essential fats that children need for growth and development.
- ✓ involve children in some cooking – making bread, cakes or biscuits and preparing vegetables helps them learn and experiment with a wide variety of foods
- ✓ make sure toddlers have at least one fruit and one vegetable at lunch
- ✓ cut fruit and vegetables into slices, cubes or sticks – this makes them easy for toddlers to eat
- ✓ try new recipes – toddlers often prefer veggies which have been stir-fried, roasted or baked rather than boiled
- ✓ serve milk and dairy products or alternatives to your children three times a day to give them enough calcium. 120ml of milk, a 120g pot of yoghurt or a matchbox-size piece of cheese all count as one serving

Grub4life.org.uk offers a range of early years nutrition and cookery training modules and resources specifically designed for nursery managers, cooks and their assistants.

The Caroline Walker Trust ([cwt.org.uk/pdfs/Under5s](http://cwt.org.uk/pdfs/Under5s)) offers excellent guidance for early years childcare providers

## DON'T'S

- ✗ buy low-sat or salt alternatives; they still contain sodium
- ✗ rely on ready meals too often; try to cook from scratch
- ✗ serve too many smoked foods; the traditional smoking process often involves adding a lot of salt to meat, cheese or fish
- ✗ ignore the label; foods which contain more than 0.3g of salt per 100g are high in salt, so steer clear!
- ✗ forget hidden salt in foods where you wouldn't expect to find it – e.g. breakfast cereals, biscuits, sauces and condiments
- ✗ serve too many high-fibre foods to toddlers; these will fill them up and make it difficult to eat the full range of foods they need
- ✗ serve low-fat milk to children under two years; they need the energy from whole milk. Children over two who eat well can move on to semi skimmed
- ✗ serve undiluted fruit juice, fizzy drinks or concentrated squash to toddlers; these contain high levels of concentrated sugar and acids which can cause extensive damage to teeth and can lead to obesity
- ✗ rely on follow on milks for toddlers unless they are poor eaters; they discourage children without feeding problems from eating normal family food
- ✗ ban toddlers from ever eating crisps and chocolate; instead make them occasional foods you eat together and never use them as rewards
- ✗ serve diluted squash to toddlers in bottles – use a cup. The bottle bathes kids teeth in sugar and promotes decay
- ✗ panic if toddlers don't eat 'perfectly' all the time; 75% of toddlers go through periods of faddy or fussy eating – it's normal!

## INSTEAD, WHY NOT TRY...

	Salt content
<b>Breakfast</b>	
30g Shreddies with semi skimmed milk and a banana:	0.2g
<b>Mid morning</b>	
Fruit Fromage Frais	0g
<b>Lunch</b>	
Tuna mayonnaise sandwich (made with canned tuna in spring water and low-salt mayo)	0.8g
200g serving home-made vegetable soup using very low-salt vegetable stock	0.1g
Carrot and cucumber sticks	0g
<b>Dinner</b>	
Roast chicken	0.25g
Home-made mushroom and onion sauce	0.2g
Home-made mashed potatoes	0.1g
Boiled carrots and peas	0.01g
Home-made apple crumble	0.1g
Fromage frais	0g
<b>Total for day:</b>	<b>1.76g</b>

**The Denby Report**

To find out more about Grub4Life or how to access training and resources, contact Nigel Denby at [nigel@grub4life.org.uk](mailto:nigel@grub4life.org.uk)