

Simple Switches for a Healthier Eating Pattern

What Is an Eating Pattern?

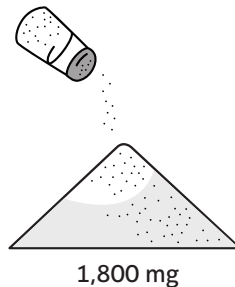
When we think of patterns, we usually think of a colorful design that repeats, such as checkered shirts, plaid shorts, and striped pants. In music, we hear repeating patterns in the lyrics and the rhythm. Patterns are everywhere. Not only do we see and hear patterns, but our lives follow them, too. An **eating pattern** describes the kinds of foods and beverages we eat over time. Think about the foods you eat frequently and the foods you eat only once in a while. This is your eating pattern. You can make simple switches to the foods and beverages you choose to have a healthier eating pattern.

Vocabulary words are in **bold** and **underlined**. See definitions on p. 4.

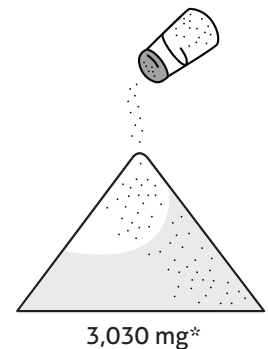
How Middle Schoolers Eat

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), if you are like the average middle school student, you probably eat more **added sugars**, **saturated fat**, and **sodium** than is healthful. On average, children ages 9 through 13, are eating almost two times more added sugar than they should and 1,230 to 1,650 more milligrams of sodium. They also consume more saturated fat than is recommended.¹ This type of eating pattern may contribute to health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.

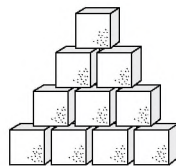
SODIUM LIMIT FOR 9–13 YEAR OLDS:



AVERAGE AMOUNT OF SODIUM CONSUMED:

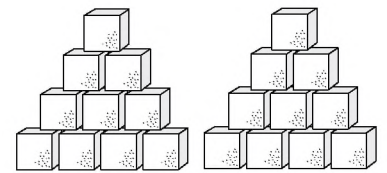


ADDED SUGAR LIMIT FOR 9–13 YEAR OLDS:



Less than 45 g or 11 teaspoons of sugar**

AVERAGE AMOUNT OF ADDED SUGARS CONSUMED:



81 g or 20 teaspoons of sugar***

1 cube = 1 teaspoon of sugar
1 teaspoon = 4 grams

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2020, December). *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*. 9th Edition. <https://dietaryguidelines.gov>.

* This is the average daily intake level for a 9–13 year-old-female.

** The amounts shown are for the average 9–13 year-old-male. The added sugar limit is based on calorie needs and may be different for males and females. It is also different for males and females with different levels of physical activity.

*** This is the average daily intake level for a 9–13 year-old-male.

Why What You Eat and Drink Matters

Take a look at the information below about benefits of eating patterns that are higher in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, seafood, beans, peas, and nuts and lower in added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat.

EATING PATTERNS WITH LOWER AMOUNTS OF ADDED SUGARS

CAN LOWER THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE, OBESITY, TYPE 2 DIABETES, SOME CANCERS, AND TOOTH DECAY.

EATING PATTERNS WITH LOWER AMOUNTS OF SODIUM

CAN LOWER THE RISK OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION).

EATING PATTERNS WHERE SATURATED FAT IS REPLACED BY UNSATURATED FAT

CAN HELP LOWER THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE.

Type 2 Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious disease. It means that your blood glucose, also called blood sugar, is too high. Glucose is the main source of energy for the body. With type 2 diabetes, the body cannot use the insulin (a hormone) it makes to use the energy (glucose) from food. As a result, too much glucose builds up in the blood and urine. Too much glucose in the blood can cause serious health problems.

Where do the added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat come from in your eating pattern?

Which foods contribute the most added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat to the eating patterns of middle schoolers? Take a look at the graphics below to find out the top food sources.¹ How often do you eat these foods?

ADDED SUGARS



Sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., sodas and sports drinks), desserts, and sweet snacks are top sources of added sugars.

SODIUM



Burgers, tacos, and sandwiches; rice, pasta, and other grain-based dishes; and pizza are top sources of sodium.

SATURATED FAT



Burgers, tacos, and sandwiches; desserts and sweet snacks; higher fat milk, yogurt, and cheese; and pizza are top sources of saturated fat.

¹See footnote 1 on p. 1.

Simple Switches: The Middle School Edition

There are many different healthy eating patterns, but they are all low in added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat. You can have a healthy eating pattern that reflects your culture, traditions, and likes and dislikes. Just start by making some simple switches to include more healthy food and beverage choices, whether you're eating fast food, a meal at home, food from school, or a snack.

The typical meals are much higher in sodium, added sugars, and saturated fat. Reduce the amount you consume by making simple switches in some foods. Look at the difference between the typical meals and simple switches meals:

SAMPLE RESTAURANT MENU

TYPICAL CHOICES

NUTRITION INFO

SIMPLE SWITCHES

NUTRITION INFO

YOU SAVE:

MEAL 1:

Double cheeseburger, Fries (large), Soda (20 oz)

Sodium: 1,339 mg
Added sugars: 59 g
Saturated fat: 15 g

MEAL 1:

Grilled chicken sandwich, Garden salad (2 cups) with dressing (2 tablespoons), Low-fat milk (1 cup), Apple slices (1 bag)

Sodium: 889 mg
Added sugars: 3 g
Saturated fat: 7 g

Sodium: 450 mg
Added sugars: 56 g
Saturated fat: 8 g

MEAL 2:

Pepperoni pizza (2 slices), Sweet tea (20 oz)

Sodium: 1,706 mg
Added sugars: 47 g
Saturated fat: 12 g

MEAL 2:

Cheese pizza (1 slice), Garden salad (2 cups) with dressing (2 tablespoons), Water (20 oz)

Sodium: 763 mg
Added sugars: 1 g
Saturated fat: 7 g

Sodium: 943 mg
Added sugars: 46 g
Saturated fat: 5 g

SNACK:

Cheese puffs (1 cup), Sports drink (20 oz)

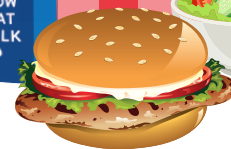
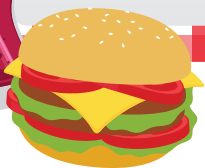
Sodium: 562 mg
Added sugars: 30 g
Saturated fat: 2 g

SNACK:

Lite popcorn (1 cup), Sparkling water (20 oz)

Sodium: 36 mg
Added sugars: 0 g
Saturated fat: 0 g

Sodium: 526 mg
Added sugars: 30 g
Saturated fat: 2 g



Tips for Healthier Meals and Snacks

Check out these easy ways to make healthy choices that fit your lifestyle.

- 1. When eating out, compare nutrition information** between foods and make a healthier choice. Many restaurants have the full nutrition information including the added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium content of their meals listed online. Also, try preparing more meals and snacks at home with your family instead of eating out.

2. Choose fruits and vegetables instead of salty snacks and candy. Sodium, added sugars, and saturated fat can really add up in the snacks you choose. Eating an apple instead of a bag of fruit-flavored candy saves you 4 teaspoons (16 grams) of added sugars.

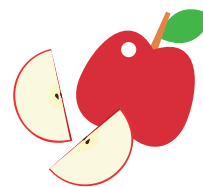
3. Choose water or unflavored, low-fat (1 percent) milk instead of sugar-sweetened beverages like soda, fruit-flavored drinks, and sports drinks. Choosing water instead of a regular 12-ounce cola will save you 8 teaspoons (32 grams) of added sugars! Watch out, fruit drinks are not 100 percent juice and are typically high in added sugars.

INSTEAD OF:

bag of fruit-flavored candy



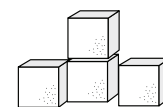
12 oz cola

CHOOSE:

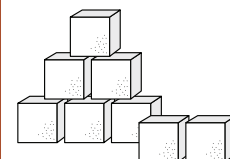
an apple



water

AND YOU SAVE:

4 teaspoons of sugar (16 g)



8 teaspoons of sugar (32 g)

Conclusions: Lead the Way With Your Healthy Eating Pattern

Most Americans are still eating too much added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. And more than 80 percent of Americans in the United States still do not eat enough vegetables, fruits, and dairy.¹ Wouldn't it be great if kids set the example? What if kids led the way to a healthy future for everyone? Make some simple switches and share your ideas with your friends and family.

Remember:

- Many middle school students are eating too many foods loaded with added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat. This leads to an unhealthy eating pattern.
- Unhealthy eating patterns may contribute to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.
- Making simple switches at snacks and meals can help create a healthier eating pattern that works for you.

¹See footnote 1 on p. 1.

VOCABULARY



Added Sugars: Sugars and syrups that are added to foods or beverages when they are processed by food companies or prepared by you.

Eating Pattern: The combination of foods and beverages that makes up everything an individual eats over time.

Saturated Fat: Fat that is usually solid at room temperature. The amount of saturated fat in a food is shown on the Nutrition Facts label, which is located on the food package. Eating too much saturated fat may raise blood cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

Sodium: A mineral generally consumed in the form of salt (sodium chloride) that your body needs in small amounts to work properly. An eating pattern that is too high in sodium may raise the risk of high blood pressure.

Unsaturated Fat: Fat that is usually liquid at room temperature. Major sources include many oils, some nuts, seeds, and seafood.

Simple Switches for a Healthier Eating Pattern

Follow the directions to answer the questions below.

IF YOU ARE USING ADOBE ACROBAT X OR PRO:

1. Open the form
2. Fill the form out
3. Go to File, Save As, choose where you would like to save the file, and then press Save

IF YOU WANT TO SAVE IN ADOBE READER:

1. Select File, Save As, Reader Extended, Enable Additional Features
2. This will allow users with the free Reader to save form data in an existing fillable PDF form
3. Click Save Now
4. Go to File, Save As, choose where you would like to save the file, and then press Save

1. What ideas in this article confirmed, challenged, or changed your thinking about healthy eating patterns?

2. Think of someone you know (friend, peer, family member, etc.) who has a healthy meal pattern. Describe why it is a healthy meal pattern.

3. You are asked to prepare a presentation to your peers about how added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat can impact their health. Provide three important pieces of information that you feel should be shared in order to motivate changes in their eating behaviors.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4a. What foods and beverages do you eat and drink that have a high amount of added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium? List three foods or beverages for each.

Added Sugars	Saturated Fat	Sodium
Soda	Whole Milk	Pepperoni

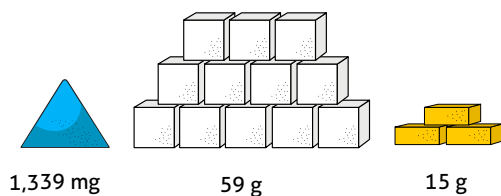
4b. On a separate page, draw or create a visual representation of your daily eating pattern (breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) using different shapes and colors for foods with added sugars, saturated fat, high sodium, and healthy alternatives.

Example:

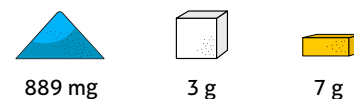
DAILY EATING PATTERN

HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE


Lunch: Double cheeseburger, Fries (large), Soda (20 oz)




Lunch: Grilled chicken sandwich, Garden salad (2 cups) with dressing (2 tablespoons), Low-fat milk (1 cup), Apple slices (1 bag)



 = milligrams sodium

 = grams added sugars

 = grams saturated fat

5a. Provide three simple switches you can make to eat healthier meals and snacks.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5b. On a separate page, or in the space below, draw or create a **new** visual representation of your daily eating pattern (breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) using different shapes and colors for foods with added sugars, saturated fat, high sodium, and healthy alternatives.

