



Caribbean Association of Nutritionists and Dietitians (CANDi)

Caribbean Nutrition Day ~ June 1, 2015

Healthy Eating & Active Living

Over - Salted Children?

Sugar and spice and everything nice, that's what little girls are made of!

Across the Caribbean, practically every country's dietary guidelines encourage the limited use of sodium in the diet. While we try to focus on and encourage the consumption of our native wholesome foods, there still remains a high consumption of processed foods which are significantly high in sodium. These foods have become a popular dietary staple for many. They are heavily advertised, easily accessible, very acceptable and tasty... Salty foods taste good! Don't they?

However, while they are tasty, excessive intake may cause serious health problems. Consensus Action on Salt and Health in *How does salt affect children* stated that it is well known that a high salt intake is associated with high blood pressure in the adult population. There is now evidence to show that a high salt intake in children also influences blood pressure and may predispose an individual to the development of a number of diseases including: high blood pressure, osteoporosis, respiratory illnesses such as asthma, stomach cancer and obesity. Furthermore, there is evidence that dietary habits in childhood and adolescence also influence eating patterns in later life.

Childhood should be a time of fun and learning. No child should have to suffer with a disease or condition that becomes expected for older adults. They shouldn't have to worry about taking pills or their childhood being interrupted by trips to the doctor for blood pressure management. This therefore makes it imperative that we (policy makers, food manufacturers, food marketers, retailers, lunch vendors, restaurateurs etc.) ensure their food environment is 'safe' from highly refined and processed food and that the healthier options are more accessible and affordable. It becomes necessary that we (parents/guardians, dietitians, nutritionists, teachers etc.) teach and guide their dietary choices. Research has shown that the choices they make now will influence their choices through to adulthood.

Here are some ways to reduce sodium in children's diet:

- Choose the right cereals! Most children love cereal. However, many boxed cereals tend to be high in sodium so be sure to read the Nutrition Facts on the boxes/bags and choose cereals with no more than 5% of the percent daily value (% dv) for sodium. This also applies to commercial waffle and pancake mixes. Make your own instead!
- It's snack time! Offer fresh or frozen fruits and fresh vegetables, whole grain crackers, muffins and cookies and trail mixes instead of chips, salted nuts, crackers and popcorn, French fries (restaurant prepared), processed cheese snacks, processed meats (like nuggets, hotdogs, sausages, bacon, ham), pasta mixed dishes, cupped noodles and pizza.
- Let's eat out! When dining at restaurants, ask about the sodium content of various dishes especially the ones that children love.

Other things we can do:

- Teach children how to make better snack and lunch choices especially when at school, parties or wherever food is offered.
- Lobby for local food manufacturers to produce foods with less sodium
- Lobby for fast food restaurants and other restaurants to prepare foods with less sodium.
- Modify recipes to use less salt.
- Do not add salt to prepared food.
- If you have a salter shaker on your table, get rid of it!
- Use a variety of herbs and spices and go easy on the salt.
- Prepare your own soups, marinades, salad dressings, condiments etc.
- Eat more real or whole foods and as less processed and refined foods as possible.

We cannot afford to raise salty children. Their lives depend on us and what we do for them now. Together all of us have a part to play in our children's health. Our children are our future so we need to ensure that they are as healthy as can be during childhood so they can become vibrant and productive adults.

Shandera A. Smith,
President, CANDi (2014 – 2016)

Caribbean Nutrition Day initiated by the Caribbean Food & Nutrition Institute (now defunct) in 2005 is celebrated on 1st June annually. Although one day is celebrated Nutritionists and Dietitians use the entire month of June to create an awareness of the importance of healthy eating and active living towards reducing this burden of disease among our Caribbean communities.