

Hold the salt!

A SHORT TIME AGO while standing in line at a popular fast-food restaurant, I overheard the mother of several young children placing an order for hamburgers and fries, but she ended the request with "hold the salt." While the frequent eating of burgers and fries has become a way of life for the younger generation, and also on occasion for me, a bit of discretion in ordering is important.

It is becoming recognized that children and many adults eat too much salt and it may put them at risk in developing high blood pressure.

While listening to one of the early morning news and talk shows recently, I was interested in a program director's interview of a group of school children who had an opportunity to eat lunch in the school cafeteria. For some children the school lunch represents the best nutritional food intake of the day. I was surprised to learn from the interview that many of the children skipped the school lunch and instead went across the street to a restaurant to order a hamburger and fries. Others went to a nearby pizza restaurant and ordered a large slice of pizza. All of these foods usually contain high amounts of sodium.

In a recent report by Frank in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* (July, 1988) there is a statement that "parents need to be put on a salt alert." The author studied the eating habits of nearly 1000 children ages 6 months to 12 years. At age 6 months, 66% of the infants exceeded the National Research Council's recommendation range for sodium. At 1-10 years, 90-100% and at 13-17 years, 60-65% exceeded the recommended range. Frank emphasized that children may be developing a life-long taste preference for foods high in salt content.

Evidence incriminating dietary sodium in the development of hypertension stems from both experimental and population studies. Individuals with hypertension demonstrate higher concentrations of sodium in blood vessels and cells, increased cardiac output, and higher blood volume.

The study indicated that 10-30% of the school-age children had sodium intake exceeding twice the limit of the recommended range. Surveys indicated that about 20-25% of sodium is consumed in snacks. Lunch and dinner provided most sodium for preschoolers, reflecting a similar pattern seen for 10-17 year olds.

It is recognized that an estimated 58 million people in the United States suffer from hypertension as reported by the United States Public Health Service. Some ways to cut back on high sodium intake are by: choosing low-salt or no-salt crackers and chips; avoiding instant cereals and processed foods; requesting fast-food restaurants to "hold the salt" on french fries; and limiting condiments, such as pickles, mustard, and catsup, all of which are high in salt. Parents of young children also should read labels on baby foods.

The pediatric dentist and his auxiliaries often assume the role of a supporting nutrition counselor. In a review of the young child's dietary habits it is important to determine the adequacy of the diet and also detect evidence of an excessive intake of foods linked to the initiation of the caries process. The recent study by Frank provides evidence that our colleagues also should be aware of the ill effects of an excess intake of sodium.

A.S. McDonald