



Canadian Stroke Network

Réseau canadien contre
les accidents cérébrovasculaires



Réseau des aliments et des matériaux d'avant-garde
ADVANCED FOODS & MATERIALS NETWORK

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2010 Canadian “Salt Lick Award” goes to Gerber Graduates

*“Chicken and Pasta Wheel Pickups” toddler dinner
dishes out sodium equivalent to two orders of medium fries at McDonald’s*

OTTAWA, Feb. 2 — Two of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence – the Canadian Stroke Network and the Advanced Foods & Materials Network – today awarded the third annual national “Salt Lick Award” to Gerber Graduates Lil’ Entrées. This choice was made because the “Chicken & Pasta Wheel Pickups” dinner serves up the sodium equivalent to two orders of medium McDonald’s Fries.

The Gerber Graduates meal, which the packaging says is “appropriate for children 1 year or older” and “specially made for toddlers,” contains **550 mg** of sodium, or more than half a toddler’s adequate daily intake of **1,000 mg**. Meanwhile, according to the McDonald’s Canada website, a medium order of French Fries contains 270 mg of sodium.

This year, the Salt Lick Award focuses on food for young children in order to highlight the inappropriately high levels of sodium added to meals targeted at toddlers. The Canadian Stroke Network and Advanced Foods and Materials Network conducted a product scan of popular baby and toddler foods, resulting in selection of the Graduates meal for the Salt Lick Award. There is good news however: some popular brands in the marketplace have no added sodium.

Dr. Kevin Willis, who leads efforts by the Canadian Stroke Network to raise awareness of the dangers of excessive sodium intake, says “there is a concern that eating too much sodium in childhood can lead to a preference for salty foods and, consequently, an increased risk of disease as an adult.”

Dr. Rickey Yada, Scientific Director of the Advanced Foods and Materials Network, mirrors this sentiment: “Canadians need to follow the ‘everything in moderation’ concept to develop a healthy and sustainable diet. Products high in salt will make such an exercise very difficult and will contribute to the toll many chronic diseases are taking on our health-care system, and our lives.”

Ironically, in response to calls for reductions in sodium in Canada’s food supply, industry officials have argued that cuts are difficult because Canadians have a taste for salty foods -- something which is obviously programmed early in life, in part, by the food industry itself.

“One-year-olds do not demand salt in their food,” says Dr. Charlene Elliott, who is Associate Professor of Communications at the University of Calgary and Principal Investigator of a CIHR-funded grant focused on the marketing of children’s food. Elliott says that food companies are “totally playing into adult conceptions of a meal” and, unfortunately, “there is a presumed halo effect around baby and toddler foods because people expect these foods to be held to higher standards.”

Other Toddler meals high in sodium include:

- Gerber Graduates for Toddlers Lil’ Entrées “Macaroni and Cheese with peas and carrots”: **520 mg** of sodium per serving
- Parent’s Choice (Wal-Mart brand) My Little Meals™ “Shells & Cheese with Frankfurters”: **520 mg** of sodium per serving
- Gerber Graduates for Toddlers Lil’ Entrées “Cheese Ravioli in Tomato Sauce with carrots, peas and corn”: **480 mg** of sodium per serving
- Heinz Toddler “Vegetables, Beef & Pasta Casserole”: **470 mg** of sodium per jar
- Heinz Toddler “Beef Stroganoff”: **420 mg** of sodium per jar
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The Canadian Stroke Network and Advanced Foods and Materials Network are calling for increased awareness of the impact of high-sodium foods on health and the need to reduce sodium content. Health Canada’s Sodium Working Group, which was appointed in 2007, is developing a sodium-reduction strategy for Canadians, which will include education, voluntary reductions of sodium in processed foods and more research. The Working Group has yet to make its report.

A high-sodium diet increases blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke, heart disease, kidney disease and dementia. High sodium consumption has also been linked to osteoporosis, asthma, stomach cancer and obesity. The “Salt Lick” award coincides with World Salt Awareness Week - an effort by more than 20 countries to highlight excessive amounts of sodium in the food supply.

Learn more about the dangers of excessive sodium consumption at www.sodium101.ca

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About the Canadian Stroke Network (www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca)

The Canadian Stroke Network includes more than 100 of Canada’s leading scientists and clinicians from 24 universities who work collaboratively on various aspects of stroke. The Network, which is headquartered at the University of Ottawa, also includes partners from industry, the non-profit sector, provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Stroke Network, one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence, is committed to reducing the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole.

About the Advanced Foods and Materials Network (www.afmnet.ca)

The Advanced Foods & Materials Network (AFMNet), one of Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence, is a nationwide initiative that brings together researchers in biochemistry, engineering, health, law and society focused on innovative aspects of food & materials including developing new functional foods and evaluating the perceptions and impact of Natural Health Product Regulations. Collaboration and networking are key for AFMNet: Over 175 researchers at 22 universities help identify gaps in existing research capacity and support the training of highly qualified individuals destined to become leaders in industry, academia and government. Together, AFMNet is increasing innovation and enhancing competitiveness for Canada.

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