

# SODIUM REDUCTION IN INDY PARKS' FOOD PROGRAM



## WHY SODIUM MATTERS

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) recommends that children ages 4-8 years consume no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day and children ages 9-13 years consume no more than 1,800 mg of sodium per day.<sup>1</sup> However, the average sodium consumption for 8-12 year olds is 3,260 mg per day.<sup>2</sup> Taste preferences and eating habits are developed during childhood, so establishing healthy eating habits that align with the DGA during childhood can have lifelong impacts on promoting health and preventing chronic disease.

| INDY PARKS FOOD CATEGORIES | SODIUM |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Meals                      | 740 mg |
| Meat/Alternatives          | 480 mg |
| Grains                     | 230 mg |
| Vegetables                 | 230 mg |
| Fruit                      | 230 mg |
| Snacks                     | 200 mg |

**TABLE 1: INDY PARKS SODIUM TARGETS**

Indy Parks Food Program serves free meals to children through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), including the At Risk After School Meals Program (ARASM) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Meals must serve the following components: meat or meat alternative, grain, fruit, vegetable, and milk. The meals are served at sites where at least half of the children are eligible for free and reduced priced meals, which is determined by family income. Low-income families are at higher risk of being food-insecure or having inconsistent access to food for an active and healthy life.<sup>3</sup> ARASM and SFSP meals provide an additional nutritious meal to children five days a week. To enable the program to reach more children, Indy Parks serves cold meals in parks, libraries and other facilities without hot holding kitchen equipment.

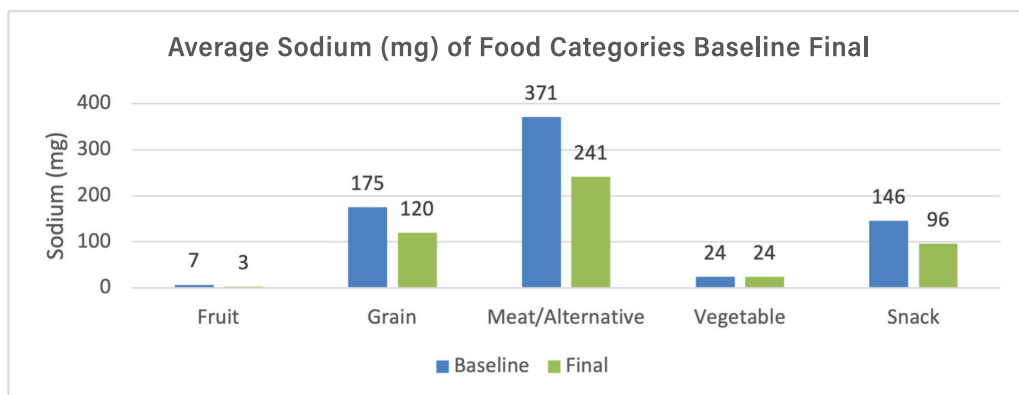
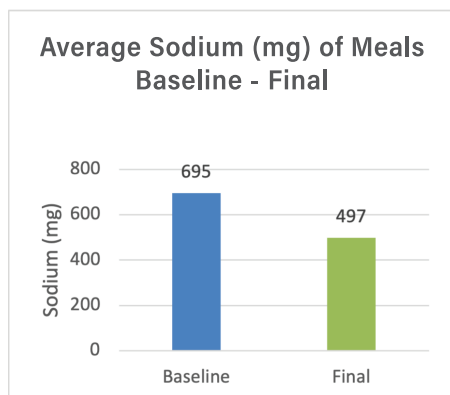
## INTERVENTION APPROACH

Indy Parks and their food service provider, Chef for Hire, partnered with the Marion County Public Health Department (MCPHD) on the Sodium Reduction in Communities Program (SRCP) to lower the amount of sodium in meals served by the Indy Parks Food Program. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded MCPHD a five-year cooperative agreement to implement the program. A team of registered dietitians from MCPHD, the program manager from Indy Parks and the chef from their food service provider worked together to accomplish this using the following strategies: create sodium targets, identify high-sodium products to be replaced by lower-sodium items, add new meals, provide nutrition education, and implement food service guidelines. The goal was to gradually reduce sodium by 20%. Annually, MCPHD registered dietitians conducted a nutrient analysis to track progress towards the goal.

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The sodium targets by food categories used for the project can be seen in Table 1. These were used to identify products and recipes that were candidates for replacement. Examples of product replacements include lower sodium buns and sandwiches. New meals include taco hummus with reduced fat chips and sunflower seeds and cereal with a cheese stick and yogurt. Replacements and new items were facilitated by the chef's knowledge of what other products are available, how to make cost-neutral changes and maintain sensory and nutrition quality of the products. MCPHD staff conducted taste tests to ensure that children accepted the changes made. Nutrition education handouts were created for staff, parents and children, and were placed in bins that could also be utilized at meal sites. Nutrition guidelines are standards incorporated into the contract with the food service provider that ensure sustainability of changes made within the project.

## RESULTS



During the past five years, the average sodium in meals was lowered from 695 mg per meal to 497 mg per meal, a reduction of 28.5%. Sodium reduction occurred in each meal category as well. At baseline, 85.6% of foods served met the Indy Parks sodium targets. After the intervention, 93.4% of foods served met the Indy Parks sodium targets. Partners worked together to make changes that remained within the program's cost constraints, improved the nutrition profile, and maintained client preferences. By serving meals that align with the DGA, Indy Parks Food Program is serving foods that promote healthy growth and development.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Indy Parks Food Program: Joenne Pope, Senior Manager of Community Programs: [Joenne.Pope@indy.gov](mailto:Joenne.Pope@indy.gov)  
MCPHD Chronic Disease Program: [Chronic@marionhealth.org](mailto:Chronic@marionhealth.org)

## REFERENCES:

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