



Should Kids Pass on Pizza?

January 25, 2015 at 6:10 pm, by [Elisa Zied](#)

According to a recent [article](#) in the Atlantic, the U.S. pizza industry serves about 100 acres of pizza daily. That's enough pizza to fill about 77 [football fields](#).

Of course the popularity of pizza among grownups and kids alike is no surprise. Not only does the concoction of dough, sauce, and cheese taste great, but it's such an easily accessible food—something we can easily grab and go with (no utensils required). And as any parent or child knows, pizza is probably the most popular staple at kids' birthday parties and other celebrations at school or otherwise.

Despite its popularity, some researchers believe that pizza is something that should be limited in kids' diets. According to a new study in [Pediatrics](#), national survey data revealed that although total calorie intake from pizza has declined 25 percent from 2003-2004 to 2009-2010, on days kids ate pizza they also consumed more calories, [saturated fat](#), and [sodium](#) that they did than on days they didn't down the doughy delight. The study also found that on pizza-eating days, children 2- to 11-years old consumed an extra 84 calories, 3 grams of saturated fat, and 134 milligrams of sodium than they did on non-pizza-eating days.



Researchers also found that having pizza as a snack or consuming pizza purchased at [fast-food](#) restaurants had the greatest impact on total calorie intake.

Because of the possible adverse dietary effects of pizza intake, the researchers recommend curbing pizza intake and improving the nutrition content of the beloved dietary staple.

I love pizza as much as the next parent and give it to my kids, usually once or twice weekly. In my opinion, the key to consuming pizza is to keep an eye on portion size. Less is more, and pairing a fast-food pizza slice with a colorful salad (with a tablespoon or two of an oil-based dressing), steamed or lightly sautéed vegetables (on the side or on top), or a reduced- or low-sodium soup are great ways to limit any possible perils associated with pizza intake and to help kids increase their intake of [fruits and vegetables](#).

Blotting pizza is also a good way to make it less oily—it may even save some calories without taking away from the nutritional value of the meal. And instead of eating pizza by folding it in half, slicing it into two halves or cutting it into small bites and eating it with a fork also can help kids eat more slowly and mindfully and pace themselves better at their meal.

Limiting intake of pizza you order or take out from anywhere—a restaurant, a movie theater, a ballpark—and making it a once- or twice-a-week or once-in-a-while treat probably not a bad idea to [help kids eat less and better](#). Making it more often at home can also help you have more control over portion sizes. Using more nutritious ingredients e.g. whole grain dough, low- or no-sodium sauces, and lower fat cheeses and having your kids help make the pizza can also help your kids not only eat better but have fun with you in the kitchen.

Perfect pizza toppers

According to culinary nutritionist [Rachel Begun](#), MS, RDN, “Roasting vegetables brings out their sweetness, which kids particularly like.” Some of her favorite “sweet” toppings include roasted garlic and peppers, roasted squash or sweet potatoes (with sautéed spinach). She also recommends tasty herbal combinations to top pizza including pesto sauce with roasted tomatoes, or a bruschetta sauce made with tomatoes, onions and herbs, like cilantro or basil. And for kids who want the meaty, salty, crunch of bacon bits atop their pizza, Begun recommends this alternative which tastes remarkably similar: Thinly slice cremini or shiitake mushrooms, coat with olive oil, soy sauce and sweet smoked paprika, and bake at 375 degrees Fahrenheit until the mushrooms are browned and have shrunk. Let them cool for a few minutes until they are nice and crispy. Add them to your pizza in the last few minutes of cooking.

“I love to top pizza Roman style—with eggs,” says culinary dietitian and cookbook author [Jackie Newgent](#). For simplicity, she suggests frying them separately in a little grapeseed oil and then adding on top of cooked pizza. She also likes to top prepared pizza with Haas avocado cubes, a squirt of lemon juice, and an optional sprinkling of organic bacon bits. And when it comes to white pizza—the kind made without red sauce—Newgent suggests black sesame seeds as a topper. “They act as “confetti” on pizza and give it extra crunch,” she says. An added bonus: kids can have fun shaking the seeds on. According to Newgent, a little bit of orange zest (grated orange peel) also works great as a flavor accent on white pizza. “Think of it like you might sprinkle on parmesan cheese, but it’s fresher and fruitier,” she adds.

[Cookbook author](#) and culinary instructor Robyn Webb also recommends the following combinations to give a spin to pizza: caramelized onions (in the smallest amount of olive oil) with walnuts (see photo); arugula with chopped tomatoes and parmesan shards; or roasted red, yellow and orange peppers with fresh thyme.

How often do you eat pizza with your kids, and what are your favorite toppers?

Image of caramelized onion and walnut pizza via Robyn Webb.