Put down that slice! Experts say too much pizza is making kids obese

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.29.15

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Students at Chimborazo Elementary School enjoy healthy fare during lunch on Jan. 12, 2007, in Richmond, Virginia. The school revamped its lunch offerings to promote a healthier lifestyle for the children, including wheat pizza with low-fat cheese. Photo: AP Photo/Lisa Billings

LOS ANGELES — Kids love pizza, but pizza doesn't love them back. Instead, a new study shows, it's making them fat.

On days when children eat pizza, they consume an average of 408 calories more than when they eat their regular diet. In addition, they're taking in an extra 3 grams of fat and 134 additional milligrams of salt.

For teens, putting pizza on the day's menu adds 624 calories, 5 grams of fat and 484 milligrams of salt.

Too Much Pizza

The study looked at the role pizza plays in the childhood obesity crisis. Obesity is the condition of being so overweight that it can lead to heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and even some cancers. The researchers chose
to take a look at pizza because so many kids eat it. On any given day, 22 percent of kids between the ages of 6 and 19 eat pizza. That compares to 14 percent of toddlers and 13 percent of Americans overall.

The only foods more popular with kids are desserts such as cakes, cookies and doughnuts.

Professor Lisa Powell of the University of Illinois and her coworkers used a national survey to figure out pizza’s impact on children’s diets. Participants in the survey listed all the foods and drinks they consumed in the previous 24 hours. A total of 7,443 children between the ages of 2 and 11 and 6,447 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 took part in the new study.

**It Used To Be Worse**

The results revealed that younger kids eat 83 calories worth of pizza a day on average, while teens eat 143 calories of pizza each day. Those amounts were high enough to account for 5 percent and 7 percent of total daily calories, respectively.

On days when pizza is eaten, it makes up 22 percent of children’s calories and 26 percent of teens’ calories, the researchers found.

The survey looked at pizza consumption in 2009 and 2010. Though high, the numbers were even worse in 2003 and 2004. Compared with the earlier period, the more recent figures were 25 percent lower for younger children, according to the study. They were 16 percent lower for teens.

The decline in pizza eating was seen mainly in younger children who are white or African-American, bringing them closer to the consumption levels of Latino children.

**Experts Attack Pizza Snacks**

The amount of pizza eaten by teens remained basically the same throughout the study.

To the extent that kids cut back on pizza, they did so at dinnertime. By the end of the study period, the amount of pizza eaten for dinner was similar to the amount eaten for lunch.

Kids also ate a small amount of pizza for breakfast or as snacks. The snack pizza was particularly troubling to the researchers. On days when children had this indulgence, they ate 202 more calories over the course of the day compared with days when they didn’t. For teens, pizza snacks added 365 calories to the daily total.
Powell and her co-workers stopped short of declaring a war on pizza, but they said its effect on kids’ diet was similar to that of sugary drinks. Pizza “should become a target for counseling for the prevention and treatment of obesity” by children’s doctors, they said.
Quiz

1 Select the paragraph from the section “It Used To Be Worse” that identifies the scope of the pizza problem in the context of kids’ overall diets.

2 Which sentence from the section “Too Much Pizza” helps explain why the researchers wanted to study pizza?
   (A) On any given day, 22 percent of kids between the ages of 6 and 19 eat pizza.
   (B) The only foods more popular with kids are desserts such as cakes, cookies and doughnuts.
   (C) The researchers chose to take a look at pizza because so many kids eat it.
   (D) The study looked at the role pizza plays in the childhood obesity crisis.

3 Read the introductory sentence from the article.
   
   *Kids love pizza, but pizza doesn’t love them back.*

   Fill in the blank. In the introductory sentence, the author suggests that . . . . . .
   (A) kids like pizza and it is an important topic for them.
   (B) pizza is only good for kids.
   (C) pizza is not good for kids.
   (D) kids like pizza, making it an important topic for parents.

4 Read the concluding paragraph of the article.

   *Powell and her co-workers stopped short of declaring a war on pizza, but they said its effect on kids’ diet was similar to that of sugary drinks. Pizza “should become a target for counseling for the prevention and treatment of obesity” by children’s doctors, they said.*

   Which answer option BEST explains why the author ends the article this way?
   (A) to describe one cause of a problem
   (B) to describe one solution to a problem
   (C) to summarize an important problem
   (D) to identify the importance of a problem
Answer Key

1. Select the paragraph from the section "It Used To Be Worse" that identifies the scope of the pizza problem in the context of kids' overall diets.

   **Paragraph 6:**
   The results revealed that younger kids eat 83 calories worth of pizza a day on average, while teens eat 143 calories of pizza each day. Those amounts were high enough to account for 5 percent and 7 percent of total daily calories, respectively.

2. Which sentence from the section "Too Much Pizza" helps explain why the researchers wanted to study pizza?

   (A) On any given day, 22 percent of kids between the ages of 6 and 19 eat pizza.

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   (C) The researchers chose to take a look at pizza because so many kids eat it.

   (D) The study looked at the role pizza plays in the childhood obesity crisis.

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   (D) kids like pizza, making it an important topic for parents.
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