

Art of Eating Naked

Going Au Naturel with Your Food

-- By John McGran, Food Writer

When was the last time you ate naked? No, I'm not talking about that pizza you ate in bed last weekend, so please put your pants back on.

I'm talking about whipping up lunch or dinner without condiments, sauces or the other extras we've come to think of as "must-haves" for bringing out the flavor of our foods: salt, sugar, creamer, ketchup, mayo, mustard, dressings, dips, and hollandaise...seriously folks!

Those who study food and eating will tell you that our love of salt and sugar, just to name a few, are learned habits that we acquired through a steady diet of the stuff.

I can vouch for the salt thing. When I discovered I had high blood pressure, I stopped shaking the white stuff on my fries, burgers, steaks and veggies. A week or two into my sodium boycott, I began to not only love the taste of my unsalted foods, but to also despise the taste of salty ones! Science backs me up. Research shows people get accustomed to lower-sodium diets in a matter of months, and also begin to find regularly-salted foods "too salty." Told you so!

But the biggest culprit isn't that little white shaker on your kitchen table. It's the sodium-soaked food products you buy at the supermarket.

You probably saw the recent headlines that told us "Food Makers Pressured to Cut Sodium." A powerful group of health experts, food police and consumer watchdogs joined forces in an attempt to shake up the salt industry.

According to an AP story that grabbed my attention, "Americans eat nearly two teaspoons of salt daily, more than double what they need for good health," and "three-fourths of that sodium comes inside common processed foods."

That same news story said that if sodium in processed restaurant foods was cut in half, 150,000 lives would be saved each year alone, according to the American Medical Association.

Current nutrition guidelines say that 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day is a safe upper limit, but the Institute of Medicine says just 1,500 mg a day is all we need (sodium helps to regulate your body's fluid balance).

So how can average Americans trim their daily intake of nearly 4,000 mg of sodium? For starters:

- Take the salt shaker off the table.
- Cook without salt.
- Experiment with salt substitutes and other salt-free seasonings like herbs and spices.

It's also a good idea to also avoid any seasonings that taste salty, including bouillon cubes, cooking sherry or cooking wine, chili sauce, meat tenderizer, seasoned salts, soy sauce, steak sauce and Worcestershire. Instead, try cooking with low-salt seasonings, such as lemon juice, vinegar and herbs.

Cutting your sodium intake is great. But why stop there? If you want to truly eat naked and be a nosing nudist, ask yourself these questions: Do I really need mayo on my sandwich, ketchup on my hot dog, and globs of dressing on my salad? The answer is HECK NO!

I find a juicy sandwich with low-fat cheese, lettuce, onion and tomato tastes great without secret sauces. Light oil and vinegar is a better choice than mayo on my Subway lunch (it lets me and my sub breathe easier), and salad dressings on the side offer more than adequate flavor. (Dip a forkful at a time rather than fishing for your veggies under a sea of Thousand Island or French.)

The calories you save will really add up each day, week and month that you reduce your use of condiments. And if you don't replace those fatty sauces and dressings with other high-cal foods, you just might drop a few pounds to boot.

Now, who's ready to go skinny dipping for dinner? Article created on: 12/11/2007