

# Don't dare take salt week with a pinch of salt!

LATOYA NEWMAN

ON THE back of World Salt Awareness Week, social media and news wires were abuzz with information on salt and health.

In an interview with POST Dr Leon Naidoo, who specialises as a pulmonologist and is a critical care practitioner based at Netcare Alberito Hospital, said the community should not take health matters related to this awareness drive with a pinch of salt.

"The annual Salt Awareness Week campaign helps raise public awareness of the damaging effect of too much salt to our health," he said.

"The international campaign has been running for 11 years, each year with a different theme. The annual campaign is a chance to talk directly to the general public, shining a light on the hidden salt in our favourite food products and encouraging those who don't want their food and their children's food laden with unnecessary salt to take action. The aim is to encourage the public to add less salt to their food while cooking or at the table.

"This is especially important in the South African context as cardiovascular disease remains one of the highest causes of local and global morbidity and deaths.

"The importance of incorrect salt balance in the body (too much or too little) cannot be overemphasised. Awareness and health thereof is so vital that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has set up forums and task teams globally to address the matter."

He said the biggest risk area associated with salt was related to blood pressure.

"Blood pressure, and therefore the risk of having a stroke or heart attack, significantly increases with age. As you get older it is important to keep salt intake as normal as possible to help ensure your blood pressure stays within a healthy range," he said.

"Furthermore, with increasing age there is also an increased salt sensitivity meaning that salt has a greater effect on



TAKE heed of your salt levels, particularly when flavouring your food.

PICTURE: PEXELS.COM

blood pressure.

"Therefore, a reduction in salt is particularly important for older people even if they do not have high blood pressure. However, this reduction should always be done after consultation with your doctor and nutritionist as a salt deficiency can be just as detrimental."

Nazein Sayed, a registered dietitian and an Association for Dietetics in South Africa spokesperson, explained how the salt in our diets affected our bodies.

"We need salt (sodium) in our bodies – it is a mineral necessary for our nerves and muscles to function and it helps maintain blood pressure in our body. The

## Quick tips on salty matters

### HOW MUCH SALT IS TOO MUCH?

On average, most people consume between 9 000 and 12 000 milligrams of sodium a day, roughly over three times the recommended amount.

The American Heart Association (AHA) suggests keeping daily sodium levels at 2 300 milligrams maximum, with less than 1 500 milligrams being preferred, especially for adults with high blood pressure.

### SIGNS THAT YOU ARE CONSUMING TOO MUCH SALT.

- You need to urinate a lot: A classic sign that you are consuming too much salt. When you mostly feel an urgent need to wake up in the middle of the night to urinate. However, this could also be a symptom of UTIs (Urinary Tract Infections), diabetes and an over-active bladder. Consult your doctor to confirm. Nevertheless, too much salt could be a reason for it.
- Persistent thirst: Constant thirst

DR LEON NAIDOO



happens because foods with high sodium content mess with your body's fluid balance. Your body continues to give you a signal that it needs more water to restore salt balance in your body. The best way to make up for this is to drink lots of water.

● Unusual swelling: Consuming too much salt can give you swelling in different parts of the body. This could be a reason why you feel bloated in the morning. The swelling can be felt on the fingers and around the ankles. This swelling is caused by excessive fluids in the body's tissues and is known as oedema.

● You find food bland and boring: Feeling the need to add more salt to food or always finding it bland and boring is probably because you are consuming too much salt. Over time, your taste buds adapt to that flavour and that is where your need to add more salt to food comes from.

● Frequent mild headaches: Do you experience mild headaches every now and then? Chances are that these headaches are dehydration-induced. Consuming too much salt is likely to give you headaches in short intervals due to dehydration. Drink lots of water to beat these headaches.

● Craving for salty foods: When your taste buds adapt to salty flavours, it craves for the same again and again. You suddenly feel the need to eat salted peanuts, chips and other salty treats.

● References: The American Heart Association, British Medical Journal and South African Medical Journal

problem is that we have way too much sodium in our diets."

"Touching on the biggest risk factors and where we often go wrong with our salt intake, Sayed said: "A lot of sodium (salt) comes from the foods we eat every day like breads, ready-to-eat cereals, salty snacks and other processed foods (like polony) and we also use salty condiments to prepare our meals, and then we also add salt when cooking and at the table – so we get a lot more sodium than we need!"

"Hypertension (raised blood pressure) is a silent killer in South Africa and high salt intakes make some of us more susceptible to a higher blood pressure. High salt intakes also mean that our

bodies retain more fluid, so our heart has to work harder and our kidneys have to work harder."

Sayed said the WHO had applauded the South African government's efforts to reduce salt intakes in our population.

"We have already had regulations to reduce the salt content of commonly eaten foodstuffs (like bread and stock cubes). These came into effect in June 2016 and the second-stage reduction comes into effect in June this year."

### Sayed's basic tips to cut down on your salt intake:

- Cut down on processed foods, salty snacks and fast foods, which often contain

high amounts of salt.

● Use herbs and spices to make your food tasty so you need less salt.

● Taste your food before adding salt.

● Don't keep a salt shaker on the dining table – easy access to salt just encourages you to add more.

● Your taste buds can adjust to the taste of food with less salt, so gradually decrease the salt you add when cooking.

● Eat more fruit and vegetables, this gives your body potassium, which assists in excreting excess sodium from the body.

● Read food labels to become aware of how much sodium the foods you eat contain and choose low sodium options where available.

## Switch up your lifestyle with these easy low sodium (salt) recipes from the Association for Dietetics in South Africa

### Lentil, Pea And Sweet Potato Curry



THE legume and sweet potato combo – both are sources of low glycaemic index carbohydrates, rich in slowly digested starch and fibre, helping to control blood sugar levels.

Also, eating dry beans, peas and lentils at least four times a week can help prevent weight gain and other health problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. It also improves gut health.

- 2 tbsp avocado oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (crushed)
- 2 carrots, finely chopped or grated
- 2 tsp grated fresh ginger
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground turmeric

- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp chilli powder
- 1 large sweet potato, peeled and cut into bite-size cubes
- 1/2 cup red lentils
- 5 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 cup reduced fat coconut milk
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 tsp honey or brown sugar

- 1 cup basmati rice
- 1 cup green peas
- 2 tsp chopped fresh coriander
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat and cook the onions for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the garlic, carrot, ginger, ground coriander, cumin, turmeric and chilli

and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the potato and lentils and stir to coat with the spice mixture.

Add the tomatoes, coconut milk, stock, garam masala, salt and sugar, bring to the boil and cover with a lid.

Reduce the heat to medium and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. While the curry simmers, cook the rice.

Add the peas to the curry and simmer, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the coriander and lemon juice. Serves 6.

### SERVING SUGGESTIONS

- Tomato and onion salsa: Combine 2 tomatoes chopped and 1/2 onion finely chopped. Season, mix and enjoy served with your curry.
- Serve on a bed of rice with a dollop of plain yoghurt and with a tomato and onion salsa.

### VARIATIONS

Replace the coriander with fresh mint. Serve with naan bread instead of rice. For more nutrients add in a cup of frozen veg.

● Source and image: Taryn Littleton for the Association for Dietetics in South Africa

### Lentil Bobotie



DRIED lentils are a quick cooking legume, taking just 15–20 minutes to cook with no need to remember to soak them beforehand. They also pack a lot of punch. They are: low in fat, high in protein and high in dietary fibre. Legumes (including lentils) provide a valuable and cost-effective source of protein and other nutrients.

- 2 cup lentils, cooked
- 30ml canola oil
- 1 onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped or crushed
- 20g grated fresh ginger
- 100g green beans, chopped
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 2 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 1 can chopped tomatoes

- 1/2 cup water
- 30ml mild curry spice
- 5ml ground cinnamon
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 free-range eggs
- 1/4 cup low fat yoghurt

- 2ml ground turmeric salt and pepper
- 10g fresh coriander, chopped
- 2 extra bay leaves

Put a large pot on the stove on a medium

heat and add the oil.

Add the chopped onion, ginger and garlic and sauté lightly for about 5 minutes. Then add the carrots, red pepper, green beans and raisins and continue to sweat for another 5 minutes.

Add the curry spice, cinnamon and bay leaves and stir for 2 minutes.

Add the chopped tomatoes and water and stir. Cook the sauce for about 15 minutes until slightly thickened and the vegetables have softened a little.

Add the lentils and season with salt and pepper to taste and mix.

Put the lentil mixture in to an oven proof dish and set aside. In a bowl, whisk together the yoghurt, eggs and turmeric. Pour the egg mixture over the lentil bobotie and place the 2 bay leaves on top.

Bake the bobotie in the oven at 180°C for about 20 minutes until the egg custard has set and is slightly golden brown on top.

Remove from the oven and serve hot with chopped fresh coriander. Serves 4.

● Source: Chef Vanessa Marx, Association for Dietetics in South Africa



GOOD food decisions start with shopping – pick the right place to shop, choose healthy and fresh, and read food labels. | PEXELS.COM

## The kitchen is the best hospital and food is the best medicine

DR VIJAY JANAGAMA

INSTEAD of paying attention to the diet when we are sick, let's analyse the power of foods and their impact on our health.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) or lifestyle diseases – like cardiovascular diseases including stroke, heart diseases, respiratory disorders and diabetes – have been rising at an alarming pace across the globe.

Diet plays a major role in adapting a positive lifestyle. In order to sustain healthy habits, it is best to consider home as the destination point. Here are a few points to consider:

- Decisions start with shopping: What we eat is not a dietary choice made at home, it is a decision made while shopping at a grocery/vegetable store. Pick the right place to shop, spend quality time on food labels and buy fresh. Healthy and tasty can go together by adding a variety of fresh produce to your diet. This can often be consistently followed in your home kitchen.
- Discipline of time: Beginning from breakfast, the appropriate timing of each meal is vital for matching the body's circadian rhythm. A healthy and timely

breakfast is a great way to start the day on a positive note. Chrono-nutrition deals with correlating timing of diet with metabolic patterns of diseases. Evidence suggests that irregularity in eating meals is associated with an increased risk for metabolic syndrome – high BMI, blood pressure and increased risk of cardiovascular diseases.

● Home remedies: From the common cold to cancer, weight loss to weight gain, there are many home remedies that can help the body perform better. There are plenty of options to serve necessary vitamins, anti-oxidants and essential elements through the right diet.

● Portion size and optimisation: Since there is a personalised approach to cooking, portion size can be optimised with minimal wastage of food.

● Economical: When healthy food comes at economical value, sustenance is a great possibility.

● Emotional health: Home food can bring the opportunity to enhance emotional wellness. Eating together around a common table is perhaps the best way to strengthen family bonding.

● Professional help: Seek professional support in establishing/supporting healthy dietary patterns at home. | IANS