

Finding hidden sources of sodium

By **BARBARA INTERMILL**
Monterey Herald

A patient with diabetes and heart disease told me he hardly uses salt. “I do buy more convenience foods since my wife died, though,” he continued. That’s an issue, according to new guidance to food manufacturers from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Citing that more than 70% of the sodium we ingest resides in packaged or restaurant foods — before we ever pick up the salt shaker — the FDA recently asked food processors to gradually reduce the amount of sodium in their products. (Note: Salt is a combination of sodium and chloride. It’s the sodium part of this popular seasoning we’re discussing now.)

Sodium is not all bad. It enhances flavors and helps preserve food from spoilage. And it’s an essential nutrient for the body to maintain the right balance of fluids.

It’s our current obsession with excess salt that has health experts worried. Diseases like osteoporosis (excess sodium can leach calcium from the bones) and high blood pressure are all related to a diet too high in sodium.

And high blood pressure is nothing to ignore, says the American Heart Association (AHA). Too much sodium pulls extra water into the blood, which makes the heart work



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harder to pump nutrients and oxygen through the body. Like a garden hose under pressure, over time, the walls of blood vessels can stretch and get damaged. This, says the AHA, can lead to a stroke or other diseases of the heart.

An adequate intake of sodium is 1,500 milligrams a day for anyone over the age of 19, says the National Academy of Sciences. Yet we Americans typically

consume more than double that amount, an estimated 3,400 milligrams. The current goal of the FDA and Dietary Guidelines for Americans is somewhere in the middle — no more than 2,300 milligrams a day.

So...until food companies figure out how to cut sodium in their products, we need to be vigilant about what we throw into our grocery carts. Packaged and convenience foods are

a good place to start — even those we tend to think of as “healthy.”

Take a look at meat substitutes, for example. Compared to 75 milligrams of sodium in a four-ounce serving of real ground beef, the Beyond Burger and other similar products has more than five times as much sodium — 390 milligrams.

Remember this when you’re comparing food

labels: According to the FDA, a food is considered “low sodium” if it contains no more than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.

“Reduced sodium” means it has at least a third less sodium than the original product.

Checked your breakfast cereal lately? Only one I know that has no sodium is good ol’ Shredded Wheat, with this simple ingredient

label: whole grain wheat. Hopefully other products will soon improve their sodium profile.

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Chef Pati Jinich’s latkes, with a Mexican twist

By **GRETCHEN MCKAY**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Latkes — potato pancakes — are traditional fare during the eight-day Jewish festival of Hanukkah, which this year ended on Dec. 6. Fried foods are symbolic of the small amount of oil that miraculously kept the ancient menorah burning for eight days instead of just one, more than 2,000 years ago.

Each family has its own recipe, and think they do it best. Some insist on grating the potatoes by hand while others are content to shred the spuds unceremoniously in a food processor; binding options include egg along with all-purpose flour, potato starch or matzo meal. But all would agree that a latke should be crispy on the outside, with feathery edges, but still soft and full of flavor on the inside.

The key to successful latke making is to fry the pancakes in a neutral oil with a high smoke point, such as vegetable, canola or peanut, and to get the oil pretty hot — between 350 and 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Otherwise, they’ll soak up the oil instead of simply being fried to a golden brown crunch in it.

You also need to squeeze every last bit of moisture

out of the potatoes before adding them to the pan. A clean dish towel or piece of cheesecloth does the trick.

While simple potato latkes are a holiday favorite, it’s also nice to spice up the dish with different flavors. Mexican chef and cookbook author Pati Jinich, who is Jewish (her paternal grandparents immigrated to Mexico from Poland in the early 1900s, and her mother’s Austrian-Czech parents fled the Holocaust), created this recipe in 2013, to celebrate the rare occurrence of Thanksgiving falling on the the first day of Hanukkah. A blend of cultures and cuisines, it features a mix of russet and sweet potatoes, with a little grated apple mixed in for a sweet, acidic note. There’s also a dash of ancho chile powder and cinnamon for the tiniest kiss of heat.

As for the accoutre-

ments? Forget the traditional toppings of applesauce or sour cream. She serves them with a crunchy, citrusy Mexican crema made with fresh squeezed lime juice and zest and finely diced fennel instead.

“It is a recipe that has no fuss,” writes Jinich on her website, and whose third cookbook, “Treasures of the Mexican Table: Classic Recipes, Local Secrets” (Mariner Books), hit store shelves on Nov. 23. “It lets these three ingredients shine through and, at the same time, complement each other.”

POTATO, SWEET POTATO AND APPLE LATKES

For latkes

- 1 1/2 pounds russet potatoes
- 1 1/2 pounds sweet potatoes

- 1/2 pound Granny Smith apples
- 1/2 cup grated white onion
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher or sea salt
- 2 large eggs well beaten
- 1/2 teaspoon ancho chile powder, or whatever dried ground chile powder you have handy
- Pinch ground ceylon or true cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour

For fennel and lime crema

- 1 cup Mexican style cream or creme fraiche
- 1/2 cup finely diced fennel bulb
- 1 tablespoon fennel fronds chopped
- Zest of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed lime juice
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher or sea salt or to taste

Wash and peel the potatoes, sweet potatoes, apple and onion and grate them, placing them as you go, into a large bowl filled halfway with ice water. After you are finished, let it all sit for a few minutes and thoroughly drain with a strainer. Wrap all the grated ingredients in cheesecloth or a clean kitchen towel and wring energetically, squeezing out as much liquid as you can.

Transfer to a bowl and combine with eggs, ancho chile powder, salt, cinnamon, baking powder and flour. Mix well.

Fill a large, heavy casserole or skillet with 1/2 inch of oil and place over medium-high heat. After 3 to 4 minutes, test the oil by adding a teaspoon of the mix. If it bubbles happily all around the edges, it is ready.

Working in small batches, to not crowd the casserole, spoon latkes of about 3 tablespoons each into the hot oil. (I use large serving spoons or my hands and shape them in flattened ovals.)

Cook until the first side is crisp and golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes, and flip to the other side, letting it crisp and brown as well, about 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack set over a baking sheet. Once you are finished, you may keep them warm in a 250-degree oven, or you may cover and reheat later on.

Prepare crema by mixing all ingredients together in a bowl. Serve latkes warm, topped with crema.

Makes about 18 latkes. — patijinich.com

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