We all appreciate tasty food, but as people in the UK get used to eating less salt, some foods served in restaurants are starting to taste too salty ... / CASH.

Contributors

Consensus Action on Salt & Health.

Publication/Creation

[London] : CASH, [2009]

Persistent URL

https://wellcomecollection.org/works/j86u5nyg

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
https://wellcomecollection.org

We all appreciate tasty food, but as people in the UK get used to eating less salt, some foods served in restaurants are starting to taste too salty. You wouldn't dream of putting sugar in someone's coffee or tea without asking them. Shouldn't the amount of salt your customers eat be their choice too?

Salt and health

Eating too much salt can raise our blood pressure and increase our risk of stroke, heart attack or heart failure. As a result, many thousands of people die unnecessarily each year from strokes, heart attacks and heart failure. These deaths could be prevented by eating less salt. People who cut out their salt intake by around 2.5g salt a day can reduce their risk of having a stroke, heart attack or heart failure by a quarter. As a chef, reducing the amount of salt that you add to the food you cook could drastically change your customers' salt intake for that day.

Salt - a personal taste

Thanks to the work that the food industry has been doing over the past few years, the salt content of many everyday foods has been reduced. This has meant that the average amount of salt that we eat every day in the UK is coming down. As we all get used to eating less salt in ready-made foods bought from shops, our taste buds are adjusting.

If you are used to eating food with a lot of added salt, the salt receptors among your tastebuds will be suppressed and you will need a lot more salt in your food to get a 'savoury' taste. However, someone who eats very little salt will find that same food inedible.

You needn't worry that customers will not like the food you cook if you reduce the salt you add to it: Research has shown that 10-15% reductions in salt are not even noticed by consumers.

Salt - a personal choice

Salt is such a personal taste – shouldn't you allow your customers to decide how much they want? Food that tastes bland to you may be perfectly seasoned to them. By not adding so much salt at the cooking stage and providing a salt cellar on the table you can leave your customers to choose how much salt they would like. The public is being encouraged to ask for less salt when they order food in restaurants – make sure you are ready to answer their requests.

Seasoning doesn't have to mean salt

Black pepper, garlic, chilli, herbs, spices, wine, lemon or lime juice and vinegar are all salt-free options that can be used to season foods and improve their flavour. And don't forget that ready-made stocks and bouillons, pickles, olives, capers, anchovies, and Eastern sauces e.g. soy sauce, nam pla and oyster sauce are all high in salt.

Some chefs prefer to use sea salt rather than rock salt because it has as a different crystalline structure. Chemically these are both identical to cooking salt and have the same long term harmful effects on our health.

Top chefs' views on salt

Gordon Ramsay

"I am pleased to support National Salt Awareness Week and the important issues it raises. A high salt diet poses many health risks and I urge all chefs to consider how much salt they add to their dishes."

Raymond Blanc

"I believe that good food does not need more than the very lightest of seasoning - there is no reason for good chefs to mask the flavour of their ingredients by adding too much salt. Remember herby, sour, bitter and acid are also wonderful catalysts of flavour. I fully support CASH and their 2009 Salt Awareness Week. Let's all eat better by going easy on the salt."

www.actiononsalt.org.uk

For further information on healthy eating please visit www.eatwell.gov.uk www.salt.gov.uk

CASH

Consensus Action on Salt & Health

Email: cash@sgul.ac.uk

Charity Registration No. 1098818