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“NAS” sausages for everybody

On page 2 of this issue we print a page of tips for local butchers on how to make low salt sausages that will comply with the food regulations. You can print another copy of page 2 by downloading Salt Skip News No 141 from www.saltmatters.org at any time.

LS—low salt not NAS—no added salt

With sausages the butcher who adds no salt will not make NAS sausages, because sausage casings are stored in brine that can never be eliminated completely. But with adequate rinsing they can be low salt (LS).

Finding an obliging butcher

Look for small family businesses in suburbs or small country towns that know all their customers by name. It is very similar to finding bakers who will take orders for NAS bread.

Some of these businesses make it a regular sideline to take orders for sausages that meet special dietary needs. The minimum order is nearly always 5 kg, so most of your purchase can go into the freezer and preferably be used within 6 months.

Some people can find friends or relatives who will share the purchase, and nowadays calcium glutamate makes so much difference to the flavour of LS sausages (see page 2) that the Wursthaus in Hobart now sells small freezer trays of 500g.

Sausages have another problem

Ordinary (unmodified) sausages don't get the Heart Foundation Tick because of another problem—fat as well as salt.

Coronary heart disease will remain the commonest cause of sudden death in fathers of young children until more people control the saturated fat in their diets—the fat in cream, butter, fatty meat and ordinary sausages. More people are buying lean meat, but buying the fat back again in sausages. Butchers can sell surplus meat fat in sausages, where the regulations permit a fat content of up to 20%.

Don't blame the butchers. The average customer still wants fatty sausages—the butchers find that people who buy reduced-fat sausages seldom buy them again. Why not? It takes a few weeks for the palate to adapt (just as it does with low salt foods and low fat milk) and most people don't realise that.

However reduced-fat sausages comply with the food regulations if the total fat content is 75% or less of the usual fat content and at least 3 g/100g less than usual.

This moderate reduction would seem greasy to people with low-fat palates but might be an acceptable compromise for the average high-fat palate.

How to make low salt sausages that comply with the food regulations

These notes are written for butchers with customers who ask for low salt and/or reduced fat sausages.

When salt and fat are under good control, **sausages** can be **healthy foods** that comply with all of the Australian Dietary Guidelines and ANZ food regulations.

Consumers need this protection—the distinction is important for people with health problems caused or aggravated by salt and/or fat, such as coronary heart disease (the common cause of heart attacks), high blood pressure (the main cause of a stroke) and the severe giddy attacks of Meniere's disorder.

Dietary guidelines and regulations

SALT: the sodium content of low salt foods must not exceed **120 mg/100g**.

FAT—especially saturated fat—must be reduced, and most of the fat in sausages is saturated. Reduced-fat foods comply with the food regulations if the total fat content is 75% or less of the usual fat content and at least 3 g/100g less than usual. This puts the upper limit for total fat in sausages at 15 g/100g.

Making low salt sausages

Sausage casings with no added salt are unobtainable, and some salt will always be carried over, no matter how well they are rinsed.

To be on the safe side the meat and other ingredients should have no added salt, because—whatever the reason—some Hobart butchers have found it very difficult to keep the sodium in sausages below 120 mg/100g on analysis.

Sausage spices need to be checked for a sodium content of 120 mg/100g or

less, with no salt in the ingredient list printed on the spice container. Spices with no added salt are available.

Low salt sausages need more spices than usual. Some customers may ask for chilli, curry powder, Mexican spices or ginger, and there is room for experiments with other flavours like mint, and any NAS spice mix.

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) has too much sodium, and customers often object to it, but calcium glutamate has no sodium. Customers find it makes a very big difference to the flavour and seldom see any problem.

The Australian distributor for calcium glutamate in packs as small as 80 grams or one kilogram is Eumarrah Wholefoods, 30 Pearl Street, Derwent Park, TAS 1009, phone (03) 6273 9511 FAX 6273 9936, email eumarrah@trump.net.au

A small amount of calcium glutamate has the maximum effect—up to 0.8% by weight—and adding more has no further effect on flavour. A 5kg batch of low salt sausages only needs 40g.

For small trial recipes it is convenient to measure calcium glutamate with metric teaspoon measures. Two level metric teaspoonfuls (10 mL) weigh 8 grams and will make a kilogram of sausage meat.

At the Wursthaus (Hobart) Mike Jones makes low salt bratwurst sausages that have a sodium content of 96 mg/100g (based on analysis). His recipe is

5kg lean beef, 5kg lean pork, spices such as white pepper, nutmeg, paprika, fresh or dried onion, preservative (optional), calcium glutamate 8 grams per kilo of the total batch.

To make sausages grind meats through a fine or medium plate, combine with all other ingredients and mix well. Fill and link using Devro low salt casings to required size.

THE GOA HAS GONE—a sad farewell by Rick Keam

Over its 20-year lifetime, Melbourne's modest Café Goa in St Kilda achieved several noteworthy things. The food was hearty, flavoursome and relatively cheap. The quirky Café's description of its clientele—'we serve plebs, two-bob snobs, yuppies, dinks, no-hopers, actors, doctors, quacks, nouveau riche etc, even advertising men'—grew longer with each new printing of its menu and business card. And in what was probably an Australian first, and possibly a world first, **the Goa remained very busy for 20 years cooking without salt** or salted ingredients and provided no salt at the tables.

The proprietors Allan Khan and chef Maria Almeida offered the Indian and Portuguese cuisine of Goa but modified it along broadly Pritikin lines. For ten years or so, they made a point of the fact that they used no salt, sugar, ghee, fermented Asian sauces, dairy produce, coconut milk, or smoked and salted smallgoods, describing themselves as 'the thinking person's eatery'. Most repeat customers, however, were happy just to think with their tastebuds. The dishes were superbly herbed and spiced and salt was simply unnecessary.

There were occasional complaints about the absence of salt, generally before the complainant had even bothered to taste the dish. One was a political hot potato: a very overweight gent who had become, in Allan's words, the 'sugar daddy' of one of the café's financial partners. He insisted on salt and insisted it was non-negotiable. Under the counter, Allan kept something special for him and, on his arrival, would deposit it on his table with much ceremony and laughter. It was a king-size plastic container of a well-known brand of table salt. On it were drawn a skull-and-crossbones, which in this case proved to be an unfortunately

accurate prediction.

Eventually the Goa came to the conclusion that making a point of what wasn't used in the kitchen, rather than what was used, was unnecessary and sometimes an invitation for trouble. They omitted all such statements from the menu and relied on the quality of the food to speak for itself. The complaints dropped off and became a rare event.

The disadvantage of this change was that customers searching restaurant directories for those accommodating specific dietary requirements could no longer discover the café's existence, as we had originally done through an SBS food guide. There was another unexpected downside when occasional Goan expatriates would arrive expecting 'real' unmodified Goan food.

'You mightn't like the taste of this dish,' explained Allan to one such visitor, 'it doesn't have any salt in it.'

The young man was puzzled: 'Then can you provide me with some salt?' Without comment, Allan produced the under-the-counter item and deposited it on the table.

As soon as the meal arrived, and before he had even tasted it, the customer reached for the salt. I never saw Allan move faster. With lightning speed, he intercepted the giant plastic shaker while it was still halfway to the dish. "*Don't do that! That's a terrible thing to do! Taste it first!*" It was a moment worthy of an award from chefs the world over.

The customer tasted, paused, thought about it, then ate. He did not reach for the salt again.

Twenty years in a restaurant is a hard slog, and the last few years of continual rises in Acland Street rentals have made commercial survival difficult. We do not begrudge Maria her rest and Allan his fishing, but will miss them badly.

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Salt Skip News will
continue to be distributed
in hard copy in The BP
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Entrepreneurs please read this page

Rick Keam's article on page 3 provides unequivocal proof that low salt catering can be marketed in Australia—it has been here and it has been a commercial **success**. A low salt restaurant has survived in Melbourne for 20 years and been well patronised until it closed through retirement. **Low salt catering can come again as soon as somebody realises its potential.**

History of the Bellbrae Health Resort

In 1985 Maurie and Gwen Rayner founded a health resort at Bellbrae, near Bell's Beach, a famous Mecca for surfers on the Victorian coast. The cuisine followed Pritikin guidelines for fat, sugar and salt, and began to cater for a growing clientele from Melbourne who were interested in fitness and longevity. Most of the guests stayed for a week, long enough in most cases to get used to the food and to enjoy the noticeable feeling of well-being that recruits to the Salt Skip Program have also reported.

It is interesting that the late Nathan Pritikin himself set a target sodium intake of 1600 mg/day (24-hour sodium excretion 70 mmol) but Australian readers of his books got the NO SALT message with the result that bakers all over Australia were making NAS bread and calling it Pritikin Bread—to Pritikin's amazement later, when he visited Australia. In the US the baking trade had convinced Pritikin that it was impossible to make bread without salt.

Bellbrae had popular cookery demonstrations showing guests all the hints and tips needed to enjoy low salt food. The cuisine used sodium-free baking powder, and provided excellent whole-meal NAS bread made locally in Geelong.

In 1986 with the agreement of the very cooperative management, 12 guests (six men and six women) agreed to make 24-hour urine collections. The average sodium excretion was 19 mmol and the range was 5 to 35 mmol (Medical Journal of Australia 1987;147:46–47). This is confirmation of a low salt cuisine—remember that sodium excretion rates below 50 mmol/day indicate compliance with the Australian Dietary Guideline for salt and make diuretics redundant for salt-related health problems.

The collapse of the Victorian Pyramid Building Society in the early 1990s forced Bellbrae to close at the height of its popularity, when it was in the middle of its second and more extensive building program to expand its accommodation.

Why doesn't a successor in every state use Bellbrae's recipe for success?

It put hundreds on the road to weight loss with its indoor gym and swimming pool, and well-organised exercise programs to suit all grades of activity, beginning with early morning walks on the beach. People returned regularly for refresher courses. People looked forward to their next trip—it was fun and it made them feel so well.

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