

Valley Health

Friday, October 4, 1991

French fries may pose serious questions

Dear Dr. Meinig:
When we were on a visit to Ojai recently, you said that we should stay from french fries like they were the plague. I didn't get a chance to ask why. Inasmuch as they are a family favorite, would you fill us in with the reasons why they should be dropped from our diet?

L.Z.

Dear L.Z.:

The ease with which we are able to pick up french fries with our fingers and their tantalizing taste puts a little spark into potato eating.

However, when we become aware of what happens to french fries before they arrive on our plate, that spark turns into a shock.

First of all, the vegetable and animal oils used in the cooking vat are subjected continually to hot temperatures that cause the oil to become, more and more, a saturated fat as the day goes by.

It is the consumption of saturated fats that are considered a main factor in heart disease. To make matters worse, many restaurants do not start each day with a fresh, new batch of oil.

The continual overheating of the oil also causes it to break down into increasing numbers of toxic substances, some of which are said to be carcinogens. At the same time, the



Dr. George

By George Meinig, DDS

hour after hour continual hot temperatures used to heat the oil destroys the vitamin and mineral content of the fat and the foods cooked in it.

French fries soak up an astronomical amount of the oil, thereby increasing the calorie count substantially. It is strange how many people refuse or eat small portions of baked potato but think nothing of eating a plateful of french fries. A 3½ ounce baked potato has only 93 calories, while 3½ ounces of french fries contain 274 calories. Add a teaspoon of butter,

they are then frozen or treated to extend shelf life. Eventually, they arrive at the restaurant and their oil vat where they are cooked again. Each heating destroys more of the potato's food value. The original amount of vitamin C in a fresh raw potato varies from 5 to 50 mg. After the double heating, the amount of vitamin C remaining would be too little to be significant.

Potato chips suffer the same indignities as do Fritos, corn chips, tortilla chips and similar snacks. The popular Ta-tos chips are brine-soaked in a salt solution to make them hard and crispy. The brine solution adds so much salt that company managers, during their start-up days, were afraid the chips might corrode the machinery used to make them. An engineering study gave the equipment a clean bill of health which is more than can be said for the people eating them. One ounce of potato chips contains 153 calories and 633 milligrams of sodium from the salt.

In order to prevent the frying oil from becoming rancid, preservatives must be used to keep oxygen away from the oil.

Frito-lay, a subsidiary of Pepsi Company, Inc., takes in \$2 million dollars a year on

snack sales, topping its rivals Nabisco and Borden.

It is hard to imagine the magnitude of these sales, the manufacturing shenanigans necessary to prepare such snacks, and the undesirable influence these products have on body chemistry.

The menu choices in many restaurants today are composed mostly of foods that are deep-fat-fried. Whether the food be fried chicken, fish cakes, potatoes, seafood or vegetables, the same unfortunate absorption of harmful fat occurs. The potential dangers to one's health is certainly not worth the risks.

There is a tendency of people to look at such information and say to themselves, 'I don't eat this stuff very often, so it can't hurt once in a while.' What is forgotten is the variety of deep-fat-fried items from snacks and other foods that keep sneaking into our stomachs on a regular basis.

Then too, how can you keep these foods away from your children if they see you imbibing them?

Everyone has questions about nutrition. Send yours to Dr. George, C/O Ojai Valley News, Box 277, Ojai, CA 93024.

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