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Why I No Longer Add Salt To My Food: A True Stroke Story

After Meliame Fifith had a major stroke, she was told she would never walk again. Three years later, the 49-year-old mother of six is walking and living a much healthier life, fuelled by a salt-reduced diet.

I had a stroke when I was 46-years-old, around three years ago.

At the time, I had just returned back from a holiday in Tonga, where I am from. I had relaxed for three weeks and then, when I came home to Australia, the stress just hit me – I was back to reality again.

I had a very busy schedule and was really stressed all the time. I'm a mother of six children and very involved in community and church programs. My husband kept on saying to me, 'you have to take it easy'. I was overweight and wasn't aware of the salt content of the food I was eating, as I really didn't take much notice of it.

I later found out that my stroke was a major one because, as a result, my left side was totally paralysed. I was told I would never be able to walk again.

Then one day, I woke up at 6am to take my husband to work as we only have one car. When I came back I decided to go back to bed as it was pretty cold.

When my alarm rang at 7am, I woke up but couldn't reach out to grab the phone to turn the alarm off.

I didn't know what was wrong. I had no idea I was having a stroke.

I called my son who was also at home and asked him to ring my husband to get him to come home. Luckily, my son called the ambulance instead first and they arrived at the house before my husband did.

That was the phone call that changed everything. I'm very fortunate to still be here.

I awoke to find my left side was totally paralysed. I was told I would never be able to walk again.

I went to rehabilitation and am still going through rehab. Although my left-hand side has started functioning, my arm has stopped moving accordingly. I can now walk again but I need a walking stick.

Having a stroke was a big eye-opener for me.



Why I No Longer Add Salt To My Food: A True Stroke Story

~ Continued:

I've changed a lot in three years. These days, I am a lot more cautious about my salt intake and diet.

Whilst visiting Tonga I realised that there are [a lot of] people who have had a stroke. Traditionally, in Tonga we usually add salt to food for taste. But I've learned that we can have food without adding salt and still enjoy it. I try to add more taste and flavour to my meals by adding more herbs.

In Tongan cuisine, we also tend to eat a lot of fish and seafood, which is naturally salty. I still eat seafood but I am now more aware of how much I eat of it. Reducing the quantity of the salty foods I ate was a big thing for me.

Fish Sauce is the saltiest offender of all the Asian sauces. A new report shows that one tablespoon of Fish Sauce contains 96% of your daily sodium requirement. Source: *The George institute for Global Health, VicHealth and the Heart Foundation.*

Before I had the stroke, because my lifestyle was so busy, I used to buy processed foods, chuck it in the freezer and cook it when we wanted something to eat. Now I cook fresh food at home and make meals from scratch, as I've realised that processed food has more salt in it than meals you make yourself. That's a huge change.

Of course fresh food is best. But if there's ever a time where I do have to buy packaged or processed foods, I've learned how important it is to read the labels.

As part of my education process after my stroke, if available, I choose 'no added salt' or 'low salt' options. This is simply because excess salt intake can cause high blood pressure which can lead to stroke, heart attack and kidney disease.

Skip the Salt

I recently had my blood test results come back. The good news is that my bloods are the best they've ever been and that's because I am aware of the salt content in the food I eat. I've also slowed down a bit.

My fear about having another stroke is still there, even though I am now very careful about my diet.

The information in this article is not intended to take the place of your healthcare provider's advice. Talk to your doctor about your sodium intake.

Source: www.sbs.com.au

Making Healthier Foods

The CSIRO are conducting research into the microscopic structure of food, how food is processed and how this impacts on the quality of everyday Aussie food products..

The Challenge for Food and Health

Dietary guidelines recommend we limit our intake of salt, sugar and saturated fats and increase fruit, vegetables, fibre and protein. Nevertheless, Australia has increasing rates of obesity and lifestyle diseases, with unhealthy eating being a major contributor.

Eighty percent of our daily diet is packaged foods such as bread, cheese, breakfast cereal, yoghurt, sauces and soups and science can help understand how we can make foods such as these as healthy as possible.

CSIRO's Response: Making the Australian food supply healthier

CSIRO scientists help the food manufacturing industry with technologies and expertise to decrease salt, sugar and saturated fats and increase the fruit, vegetable, fibre and protein in processed food products, while still tasting just as good.

This research involves understanding the different structures and materials that make up food, how food behaves when we chew and digest it, and food's biological function, to promote health and wellbeing at all life-stages - young, old and in between.
Source: www.csiro.au

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Spiced Lamb & Pumpkin Soup



With less than 5mg of sodium, legumes are on the shopping list.

Ingredients:

- 1 cups McKenzie's 12 Blend Soup Mix
- 1 tbs. olive oil
- 2 lamb shanks or lamb steak, trimmed
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1-2 (or 3) celery sticks, chopped
- 2-3 chopped garlic cloves or 1-2 tsp. minced garlic
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 litre chicken stock (Campbell's Free Range No Added Salt)
- 1 litre water
- 1-2 sprigs thyme
- 300g pumpkin, diced
- Black pepper, to taste
- Flat leaf parsley, to decorate

Method:

1. Prepare 12 Blend Soup Mix according to pack's instructions.
2. Heat half the oil in a large pot and add the lamb, cooking until seared all over. Remove from pot. Pour in remaining oil and cook onion, celery and garlic until just tender. Stir in spices and cook for a further minute.
3. Return lamb to the pot with the stock, water and thyme. Bring to the boil and simmer partially covered for approx. 1 hour. Add 12 Blend Soup Mix and pumpkin, cook a further 30-45 minutes until meat is falling off the bone.
4. Take shanks from the pot and remove meat from the bones and shred or dice. Return to pot, season with pepper. Serve with the parsley.

At Salt Skip News, we are always interested to hear from readers. Please send us your Salt Skip news, tips and salt-free or low sodium recipes... please email to Malcolm.Riley@csiro.au

BP Monitor with Salt Skip News is published every 2 months, from February to December (6 issues a year). This newsletter is not a substitute for health and medical advice. Readers should always seek the advice of a qualified health professional regarding their health or a medical condition.

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