

## Salt, Sugar and Portion Size by Joan Kekst

When I go to our cottage, I often eat breakfast at a local diner; I was waiting for my food, when a man came in, marched to the kitchen door, opened it, and called for Margaret, cook and owner. “Margaret, will you make me a big salad? I want lots of lettuce and only vegetables – no meat, no cheese, olive oil and vinegar on the side. A really big salad, about a pound of lettuce!”

We caught each other’s eye as he sat at the table across from me. “It looks like you’re eating a healthy lunch,” I said. “I’ve lost 96 pounds,” and I intend to keep them off,” he said. “Wow! How did you do it?” I asked.

The topic of better eating had been brewing in my mind, in fact, out lined on my computer. The last three issues of my favorite ‘Nutrition Action Healthletter’, (published by Center for science in the Public Interest), were burning at me to write about the dangers of excess. They focused on - Salt, Sugar and portion Size, an important reminder I felt for CJN readers. (*Cleveland Jewish News*) Today, meeting this man compelled me to get busy.

He looked like an average size man, in his mid-sixties, we exchanged names. I’ll call him Warren Jones, and launched into a long conversation. Warren is a retired special education teacher, married and lives in this rural area.

Since starting on his weight loss campaign two years ago, Warren weighs everything he eats; only 4 oz. of protein a day, he’s big on brown rice, no white flour, rarely adds salt or sugar, just bits of olive oil, lots of salad vegetables, bananas are his favorite fruit, and he sticks to his new eating habits wherever he goes. He hates making salads, so comes to the diner and Margaret (who has also shed many pounds) makes his plateful of salad. I was very impressed.

I told Warren about CSPI, a non-profit, based in Washington DC that succeeded in getting foods labeled, lobbies for better food safety regulations and is now after government control for less salt and sugar in prepared foods. CSPI just received government agreement to demand that restaurants publish salt amounts on their menu.

He asked what was special about this Healthletter. I said I like it because it provides good research data, realistic advice and the editor is fearless about being a prickly pear in the face of the food industry, fast food eateries or supermarkets on behalf of us, the consumers.

We talked about the recent issues - things everyone really knows -: excessive SALT, SUGAR and portion SIZE can help shed or put on extra pounds. Warren nodded his agreement. “These are the very things a person can control but they can be our biggest failure, too” he said.

I asked Warren how he has the perseverance to stick to his diet. He told me about OA – *Overeaters Anonymous*, which I’d never, heard of. Based on the AA principle, he goes to meetings 5 or more times a week. Warren said now he knows he ate way more salt than he should have in prepared and restaurant foods. OA helps him control his choices.

Many organizations promote healthy eating. I don’t advocate only for CSPI. I do like that they warn of danger and direct people to action. Their current warnings do resonate. With age, weight gain is easy; blood pressure increases, cardiac, diabetes, or other diseases strike and can be deadly. Mobility often decreases; the cycle continues and compounds. Warren nodded his agreement as he chomped his supersize salad and said his action needed the support of OA and his wife.

Warren said, “My wife has been super supportive of my food plan. We prefer food plan because it is forever; diet means lose - and probably gain”. Warren said he and his wife cook separately but eat together. They do eat out, but eat better at home.

We discussed the last CSPI issue; it accuses our food environment of being toxic – food is everywhere. Food ads promote two major problems: large or supersize portions for a population already burgeoning with overweight and obesity; and misleading tags on ‘health foods’. An hour’s exercise is blown away by a purportedly healthy muffin; the large smoothie drink and the chocolate covered health bar that you’re urged to grab; they’re loaded with sugar as well as soft drinks, juices, and fruit snacks. Calories mount up; sugar is addictive, the more you eat, the more you want.

Yes, we *do* tend to buy bargain priced foods, especially if the word ‘healthy’ is on the item. Everyone reads the buzz words - ‘health foods’. Yet, these foods and snacks often have as much or more sugar than anyone should eat in a day and salt content is off the scale. We’re victims of food ads for the large bargain size at the cash register and we complain about the hefty price for fresh fruit and vegetables.



As a kosher cook, I know that kosher meat and poultry are prepared according to the Dietary Laws, that is, they’re soaked and salted before purchasing. I still can’t find out how

much salt is retained after this process. Over the years, I found that in general, much less salt can be used during cooking. I add a very small amount to start food cooking or water boiling and then at the end, add small bits of salt if needed. Adding small amounts salt and herbs at the end of cooking time, increases the flavor and it stays with the food when it is served. Using olive oil, a bit of fresh ground pepper, herbs and spices are healthy and easy methods to create a variety of flavors.

Many convenience kosher items are now available. However, they tend to be high in salt and sugar. Kosher soy milk and non-dairy creamer are low in fat, but have a fair amount of sodium and sugar. Prepared stocks, soy sauce, salad dressings and sauces can wreck any attempt at healthy eating. Keep track of salt and sugar content in various brands. It's better to make your own whenever possible. Eat fresh fruits, rather than frozen or dried; which are high in sugar.



In parting, I asked Warren how he feels now that he's shed almost another person. He said his arthritis was so bad he could barely mow his lawn for half an hour. He's now training at a gym in preparation for a strenuous 10 day climb on the back hills at Yellowstone this August. We exchanged emails.

In our second email exchange, Warren told me that he too, is Jewish. He converted in 1971 and claims it is one his best decisions. He doesn't eat seafood or pork and says it's so easy not to eat cheeseburgers. It makes his food plan work, he said. What an interesting man!

Warren's advice for dining out: "weigh everything you eat at home and try to eat the same amount in restaurants. Most important thing about restaurant eating, he said, "make sure there's no flour or sugar".



Warren asked for recommendation on vegetarian cookbooks with *very* easy recipes. At home, I opened several books and found most recipes require a good deal of preparation to make vegetarian meals tasty, attractive and they serve 6 or more people. Searching for easier vegetarian recipes, here are a few I tried for my family. They are great for anyone looking for perky spring vegetable dishes whether you plan to hike Yellowstone or local parks.

### **BROCCOLI SLAW** – *Pareve*

1 lb. shredded broccoli stems, julienne (can be purchased in some super markets)

2 large carrots, julienne

2 red onions, julienne (2C)

1C kalamata olives, pitted

Juice of 1 lemon

3 - 4T olive oil

2T flat leaf parsley, chopped

Combine broccoli, carrots, onions and olives in a mixing bowl. Toss with lemon juice and olive oil. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Allow flavors to blend for 30 minutes, stir occasionally. Serve at room temperature or chilled. Serves 8. Reduce or increase amounts as needed; this slaw keeps well for 5 days.

### **SUMMER VEGETABLE SLAW** – *Pareve*

1 lb. Chinese or green cabbage, cored

1 large carrot, peeled

¼ lb. snow peas (one fourth)

1 each, red, yellow and green bell peppers, seeded

12 green beans

1 small red onion

2 ears fresh sweet corn, shucked

1/2t sugar (one half)

1/4C cider vinegar (one fourth)

1T vegetable oil

Pinch of celery seeds

Shred cabbage as thinly as possible. With a vegetable peeler, shred carrots thin as possible to cut curls. Use carrot scraps elsewhere. Julienne pea pods, peppers, green beans and onion. Remove corn kernels from the cob.

Combine all vegetable in a large mixing bowl and flavor with sugar, vinegar, oil celery seeds, salt and pepper to taste. Allow vegetables to blend in the bowl for 20 to 30 minutes.

NOTE: use shredded zucchini or yellow summer squash, if desired. Reduce or increase amounts as needed; slaw keeps 3 days.

## **TOMATO BASIL SOUP** – *Dairy or Pareve*

1T olive oil  
1 large carrot  
1 large celery stalk  
1 large leek, white only  
1 large garlic clove, cracked  
2 lb. plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped  
4C 'pareve' vegetable stock or water  
1T tomato paste  
1 bay leaf  
6 to 8 fresh basil leaves, more to garnish  
Several sprigs of thyme  
Salt and pepper to taste  
1/2C sour cream for a dairy meal

In a non-corrosive pan, heat the olive oil and cook the carrot, celery, leek and garlic until softened, about 5 – 7 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and bring to a simmer for 20 to 25 minutes. Cool and discard the bay leaf and herb sprigs.

Puree the soup in batches strain into a pitcher or bowl and chill. Adjust salt and pepper; stir in the sour cream, if using. Serve in goblets or mugs garnished with fresh basil leaves. Makes 6C Keeps 3 days chilled.

## **GRILLED CHICKEN BREASTS with NORTH AFRICAN SPICE PASTE**

8 (2" long) dried hot red chiles (I used 1T chile flakes)  
2T cumin seeds  
1T caraway seeds  
2T minced garlic cloves, minced 1T black peppercorns  
1t kosher salt (or less)  
5T olive oil  
4 large chicken breast halves with skin and bones (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. each)

Coarsely grind chilies, spice seeds garlic and peppercorns in spice grinder or in a mortar pestle. Stir together with salt and oil to form a paste. Rub paste all over chicken. Chicken can be rubbed several hours in advance. Bring to room temperature before grilling.

Oil grill rack and grill chicken skin sides down at first, directly over coals; turning occasionally. Move to cooler area of grill in case of flare-ups and cook a total of about 10 to 12 minutes. Be sure chicken is cooked thoroughly. .