

Salt and the healthy traveller

BY DOROTHY PHILLIPS

You are travelling this summer and you want to maintain your healthy diet. You are particularly concerned about salt/sodium in your food, and if you are not, you should be. Here's why.

Canadians consume about 3,400 mg of sodium each day. The medical profession recommends a limit of 1,500 mg – less for children and seniors. The Canadian Sodium Working Group, reporting in July 2010 (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/pdf/nutrition/sodium/strateg/index-eng.pdf), recommended a two-step reduction in sodium to 2,300 mg daily until 2016 and then to 1,500 mg. Since 77 per cent of our sodium comes from processed food, it's the food industry that needs to be engaged.

You love salty food. You know salt is necessary to the human body. So what's the problem? Mostly it's high blood pressure, which can cause strokes and heart attacks. Other diseases too are related to high salt intake: kidney disease, gastric ulcers, cancer and, perhaps worst for children, osteoporosis. When you excrete excess salt in your urine, you excrete calcium with it. Children consuming a high-salt diet may not build the bone mass in their teenage years that will hold them up later.

While you travel, can you eat in restaurants and keep your sodium level and your children's to less than 1,500 mg per day? You'll find it difficult in Canada, though not impossible. A recent report detailing salt in Canadian restaurant food to be found at <http://cspinet.org/canada/pdf/writing-on-the-wall-complete-report.pdf> recommends that you aim for 375 mg sodium in each of three meals and another 375 mg in snacks each day for a total of 1500 mg daily. But Pizza Hut's Spicy Italian Sausage Pasta loads you with 4,420 mg – almost three days worth of sodium in one meal! Their children's menu "Boneless Bites w/Honey Garlic Sauce" comes in at 1,210 mg. That one dish accounts for more than a full day's ration for an eight-year-old.

What can you do to get low-sodium meals in a restaurant? A small group of women who are especially sensitive to high sodium – feel thirsty, have trouble sleeping – have insisted on low-sodium meals in several Ottawa restaurants. Some restaurateurs said they would refrain from adding the usual salt as they cooked our meals, but that is not enough. Sodium lurks in their sauces, steamed vegetables, anything prepared ahead of time. We found that when each individual dish is cooked fresh, it is possible to have a low-sodium meal. At a recent meal at Ottawa's Talay Thai on Bank Street, it took some convincing; they thought food would taste bland without the usual soy sauce, but agreed to add only half the normal amount. The food was delicious, not bland, and three of four of us had no adverse reaction – one was still thirsty all night. We think the restaurant owners learned something. Chinese food too can be prepared with less sodium – no appetizers or soup, though, as they are prepared ahead of time. In Wakefield, Café Petite Inde serves delicious, almost salt-free Indian food. It just takes a little imagination.

If you are travelling to the United Kingdom, you won't find eating lower sodium so difficult. In 2003, the UK government began an active campaign to lower sodium in prepared food and they've had some success. In North America, you can already find diabetic, low fat and low gluten restaurant meal options; we think restaurants should learn to serve low-sodium too. You will find it a challenge, but if you insist on it, you will be teaching the restaurants and taking part in the campaign to lower salt in our diets.

Dorothy Phillips, a Glebe resident, actively seeks to ensure choice for those who prefer to eat a low sodium diet when dining in local restaurants.

How do you know if gum disease threatens your heart health?



Dr. Nasrin Saba practises dentistry close by in Old Ottawa South.

BY DR. NASRIN SABA, DDS

While the connection is not yet proven, studies suggest that people with periodontal disease (disease of the gums and bones that support the teeth) are at a greater risk of heart disease or stroke. The best defence is to brush and floss your teeth regularly and look out for problems with your teeth and gums. Healthy gums are firm, light pink and very elastic. So if that description doesn't fit the gums in your mouth, it's time for a check up. Watch for the following symptoms of gum disease:

- Red, swollen gums
- Bleeding after you floss or brush
- Receding gums (you see more of a tooth than before)
- Pus on the gums
- Pain when you bite or chew
- Loose teeth

The major conditions affecting the gums are:

Gingivitis. This early stage of gum disease develops when bacteria build up in the gap between the gums and a tooth. The most common form is in response to plaque, or a bacterial biofilm adhering to tooth surfaces. Symptoms may be mild, but you may notice some redness, swelling or bleeding. The only treatment you need is improved brushing and flossing habits. Neglecting this, gingivitis may progress to periodontitis, which is more destructive.

Periodontitis. This is a more advanced form of gum disease, when the infection has gone deeper. The bacteria release toxins that make the surrounding tissue swell and infected pockets form between the teeth and gums. Over time, the infection can damage the bone beneath the gums, causing the gums to recede from the teeth.

While the mechanism linking gum disease with cardiovascular disease has not been established, several theories exist to explain this.

One theory is that oral bacteria can affect the heart when they enter the blood stream. The billions of bacteria that live in the mouth unquestionably influence the health of teeth and gums, but do they also cause problems for the heart and blood vessels? Researchers found diseased gums released high levels of bacterial pro-inflammatory components into the bloodstream. These harmful components travel to other organs in the body, such as the heart, and potentially cause harm. For example, bacteria may attach to fatty plaques in the coronary arteries (heart blood vessels) and cause clot formation or thickening of the walls due to the build up of fatty proteins. Blood clots and wall thickening can obstruct normal blood flow, restricting the amount of nutrients and oxygen required for the heart to function properly. This may lead to heart attacks.

Another possibility is that the inflammation caused by periodontal disease increases plaque accumulation, which would contribute to swelling of the arteries. Researchers have found that people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as those without periodontal disease.

Although we still have a lot to learn about whether, and how, periodontitis and other oral problems are linked to heart disease, it still makes good sense to take care of your teeth. Brush and floss every day, and see your dentist at least twice a year for regular cleanings and oral exams. This will pay off for your oral health and just may benefit your heart as well!

References: *American Journal of Medicine, Journal of The Royal Institute of Public Health, PubMed Health, American Academy of Periodontology, Harvard Health Publications, Science Daily.*

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Sharing the gardening life

BY JOSIE PAZDZIOR

Gardening is essentially a solitary occupation much of the time, whether you are talking about recreational gardeners or farmers. Outdoors it's you, the plants, the bugs and the weather, working towards the final results, usually beautiful, sometimes disastrous. You have to love it, communing with nature, creating beauty, working your muscles in peaceful solitude, for even a small urban garden can take a lot of time to maintain. Problems you encounter can be disposed of with the help of the ever-so-clever Google monster. Is something missing in this picture though, perhaps a social component, a sense of being part of a gardening community?



Imagine the joy of sharing what gives you so much pleasure, of swapping stories with other passionate gardeners and then seeing their properties in turn. You can share images and text virtually on many websites and participate in tours organized by horticultural groups and garden clubs. I have seen many local gardens, and always learn something surprising, often coming away inspired.

The Ottawa region has many active gardening groups such as horticultural societies, special plant societies, organic food growers, garden clubs, Friends of the Farm and master gardeners. The mission of most includes education and/or beautification of the community, goals which will never go out of fashion. Take advantage of their programs and members' expertise to pursue your passion for orchids, bonsai, cactus, peonies, African violets or iris. Embrace the opportunity to contribute as a volunteer. You will be welcomed with open arms, and are sure to find



congenial members and activities – special speakers, workshops, plant sales, garden tours, field trips, photo contests, plant and design competitions, and community plantings. You may even make lifelong friendships!



With changing demographics and lifestyles, membership in such societies has been declining, which is a concern. Since garden clubs aim to stay relevant and up-to-date, young members with new ideas are really needed. Many young people are part of the urban movement to grow their own food in back yards and allotment gardens, a practice always encouraged by the horticultural societies. As social media play an increasingly important role in peoples' lives, clubs such as the Ottawa Horticultural Society are working out ways to use them effectively. Although the time crunch is not easing up, it would be a shame to see young gardeners lose out on the rewards of sharing the gardening life with their kindred spirits. On that note, I would like to offer my fellow gardeners some comments on an interest of mine – rock gardens.



The salmon pink flower, a lewisia, was shot by an OVRGHS member, name unknown. The rest of the photos were taken by Josie at various locations: five in gardens in the Ottawa countryside, one at the Montreal Botanic (thick horizontal rock layers in alpine garden, green foliage) and two at Kew Gardens in England.

ROCK GARDENING ROCKS!

Keen ornamental gardeners share a couple of common traits: we seek out new and different plants to add to our gardens – and we like a challenge. Just mention that this or that



stunning cultivar is not quite hardy here, and we have to try it! In time, many gardeners develop a specialty in a favorite genus or type of gardening. Given many options, ranging from bonsai to cacti and from native species to water gardens, I became intrigued by rock and trough gardening. This involves growing suitable plants between, around and even inside rocks (tufa rock). Create a miniature rock landscape with alpine plants – or use your favorite rocks any way you please. Plants that thrive here like their long roots to be cooled by the rock, running into crevices, between rocks, or underneath them; thus gardeners position their rocks to provide this long run, and maybe noontime shade.



True alpine plants are tough, compact beauties that grow low out of the wind, and put on colorful blooms to attract pollinators, displaying an amazing diversity of flower shapes, colors and foliage. Native wildflowers and plants that grow naturally among rocks are also candidates for rock gardens. Numerous websites showcase dazzling images of these appealing plants, and provide cultivation information.



Rock gardening combines both challenge and rarity. Alpine collections and rock gardens are not yet found on every street in Ottawa, unlike traditional favorites such as peonies, lilies, tulips and roses. Alpines are more rare for good reason: of the huge number of alpine species, many require special habitats, making them a challenge to maintain here. This is where special-purpose



garden groups such as The Ottawa Valley Rock Garden and Horticultural Society (OVRGHS) can help, hosting plant sales and sharing seeds and divisions as well as members' valued experience. In the winter, speakers show fabulous plants from around the world, often sharing cultivation tips for trying them here. Find the local group at www.ovrghs.ca and the North American society at www.nargs.org

Another great feature of rock gardening is that gardeners can fit more plants, of greater variety, in a small space such as a trough or scree slope – a boon to city dwellers. Troughs, which remain outdoors all year round, provide great scope for creative gardening, and can be brought along when you move. But the clincher is that alpine plants are too gorgeous to resist – especially in spring!

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