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ACTIVITY PLANNER

Dishes that tickle the taste buds

Last Updated: 12:01am BST 18/08/2008

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Tantalising menus can be dangerously seductive, but there are tricks to keeping your appetite under control, says nutritionist Juliette Kellow

What's in a name? To paraphrase Shakespeare, would a meal by any other name taste as sweet?

Well, when it comes to supper, that is apparently true. Scientists from the University of Illinois have found that word choice - the subtle difference between "seafood lasagne" and "succulent Cornish seafood lasagne" - really can change people's perceptions of a dish, and how much of it they consume.

In a recent study, they found that when customers were offered identical courses with different names, they rated the dish with the descriptive, exotic name as more appealing and satisfying - and went on to eat more of it, regardless of whether they felt full or not.

Given that in Britain we now eat one meal in six outside the home, that's worth chewing over. And never more so than on holiday, when every dinner comes with a menu full of tantalising descriptions.

An evening meal should typically provide around 40 per cent of our daily calorie intake (around 800 calories for women, 1,000 for men). But with all the tempting treats that come with eating out we can easily amass an extra 1,000 calories a day.



Evening meals can offer a range of temptations

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But the sheer choice of food available to us is also to blame - a point proven by scientists from the University of Buffalo who discovered that the more variety there is in a meal, the more we eat.

Added to this, a study published this month in the journal *Obesity* revealed that when slim people were faced with a buffet they browsed for longer, chewed more, used a smaller plate and left more on it - in marked contrast to the heavier diners. In other words, if we are already overweight, we're more likely to eat quickly, and consume more.

By being conscious of these facts, you can be a little more restrained and embrace a healthier attitude. This doesn't have to be

about deprivation.

Travelling provides the incentive to experiment with different, fresh, seasonal - and often cheaper - produce every day. A trip can also inspire the taste for a healthy food that you're not usually inclined to eat.

For example, think you're not wild about artichokes? They're full of vitamin C, folic acid, potassium and fibre and have been linked to low cholesterol levels and healthy arteries. Eat them Greek-style, with lemony potatoes and herbs, or with just the right amount of garlic and vinaigrette in France, and you may be converted.

Not tempted by tomatoes? Researchers at the University of Manchester found this year that lycopene, the antioxidant abundant in tomatoes that has anti-cancer properties, may also help to protect the skin from sunburn. Try the flavoursome varieties in Tuscany, set off with



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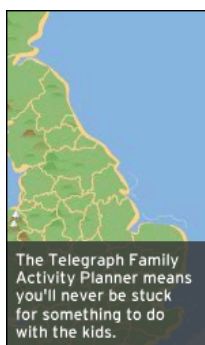
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peppery local basil and extra virgin olive oil.

Additionally, take inspiration from how foreign cuisine makes use of fresh spices and herbs - Turkish meat-based recipes, for instance, often include cumin, coriander and even sweet cardamom - reducing the need to add salt or artificial flavourings.

And if you've got the family in tow, eating out regularly is a good opportunity to re-start the ritual of eating together. Last year, a study from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University revealed that teenagers who ate dinner with their families less than twice a week were two-and-a-half times more likely to have smoked and one-and-a-half times more likely with have drunk alcohol, compared to those who ate at least five meals a week with their family.

DINING OUT TIPS

On holiday:

Alcohol impairs the metabolism, particularly its capacity to burn fat, and also increases appetite - so don't have pre-dinner drinks every night.

Drink a pint glass of water before you go out for dinner. You will feel fuller and less inclined to overeat.

Where possible, choose wine over beer: it has fewer calories, plus beneficial antioxidants.

Eat according to your appetite, rather than to keep up with others.

Choose two starters and eat one as a main course.

Take a table as far away from the buffet and service areas as possible -this makes you less inclined to order extras.

When you get home

Try to make dinner your lightest meal of the day.

Make the effort to go to your local farmers' market for seasonal produce — it's cheaper and tastes better.

Buy your ingredients on the day, and cook as many unprocessed foods as possible.

Avoid serving the usual potatoes, rice or pasta with every meal — try lighter couscous, bulgar wheat or wholegrain bread instead.

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