

Curry

The history of Indian food in Britain is almost four hundred years old. The story starts with the arrival in Surat of the English merchants of the East India Company in 1608 and in 1612. As the influence of the British in India grew, so did the interest in Indian food back in Britain, leading to the publishing of recipes and the commercial creation of curry powder in 1780.

The first appearance of curry on a menu was at the "Coffee House", Haymarket, London in 1773. In 1960 there were just 500 Indian restaurants in Britain, by 2000 there were almost 8000.

Chicken Tikka Masala is a British-Bangladeshi creation. It has become so popular that it is available in a wide range of other foods such as crisps, pies and sandwich fillings.

This is just one of the many definitions of curry:

"A dish made with dried and fresh spices cooked in oil with a sauce made from pureed onions, garlic and ginger. The variety of spices used can be extensive but the commonest are chilli, cumin, coriander and turmeric. Other common ingredients are yoghurt, cream and ground nuts."

In Britain we love curries. They are the most popular take away meal and there has been a revolution in curry eating. Where it used to be associated with gluttony and several pints of lager to wash it down, curry eating is now becoming a posh affair. Recent research claims that we could become addicted to the taste of curry, not just because of the flavour but also because curry arouses and stimulates the senses, providing a natural high. Of course not all foodies will agree with this.

As with everything, the good always comes with the bad. The bad is – our waistlines. In essence curries are very nutritious, containing a wide variety of healthy ingredients – lentils, vegetables, meat, fish, chicken, potatoes, rice etc but curries are also renowned for containing high amounts of fat. Apart from the natural fat some foods contain, generous amounts of oil are used to fry off the onions and spices, which many experts believe gives the sweet taste to the curry dishes.

A take away chicken tikka masala with pilau rice contains around 47g of fat, a vegetable biryani contains around 43 g of fat and a lamb passanda with pilau rice has around 24 g of saturated fat. If you add the starters, such as 2 tablespoons of cucumber raita and two poppadoms, you will clock on another extra 200 calories.

This does not mean that curries are forbidden. There are a few tricks of the trade to help you watch your waistline:

- Choose drier dishes such as tandoori, karia and bhuna;
- Try lower calorie meals such as spinach-based dishes (-Saag), chicken tikkas and vegetables dishes like aloo gobi (potato and cauliflower curry);
- Avoid creamy dishes such as korma, masala and dhansak;
- Avoid oily dishes such as bhaji, samos or pakhora;
- Choose plain boiled rice instead of pilau, biryani or fried rice;
- Other good choices are tandoori or madras with chicken, prawns or vegetables;
- Avoid any filled breads such as peshwari, paratha and puri; choose a plain naan bread instead;
- Remember, the portion sizes are always generous; you do not need to eat it all!