

Please Don't Pass The Salt

by Roz Warren

My sister laughed out loud when I told her that one of the few things I could do about the Meniere's Disease that I'd just been diagnosed with was to drastically reduce my intake of salt.

Why? I've been known all my life for over-salting my food. Before I even bother to taste it, I douse everything I eat. When a meal begins, everybody in my family automatically hands me the salt shaker.

I even carry a little packet of salt in my wallet, for Salt Emergencies. Such as? When we order take-out pizza at the library where I work, but when it arrives I find that the library's sole salt shaker has gone missing.

It's long been my claim that I'd rather go hungry than eat under-salted pizza.

Pouring salt on my food is one of the cornerstones of my identity. "Would you like some soup with your salt?" my brother-in-law will joke, watching as I rain salt into his delicious home made fish chowder.

I've always been lucky enough to have very low blood pressure. So when dinner companions cautioned me about the health risks of covering my entrée with salt, I'd respond with a cheerful: "Not to worry. I've got low blood pressure. I'm just self medicating."

Then came my Meniere's diagnosis. And wham! Just like that, I'm one of those women who scan the ingredient label of each item before placing it in my shopping cart, and grill waiters about the sodium content of the soup.

The only silver lining? The man in my life and I are in this together.

On the very same week that I was told to eliminate salt from my diet because of Menieres, Mark was told to eliminate salt from his because of his skyrocketing blood pressure.

What are the odds?

In the two decades we've been together, Mark and I have shared many things. A love of reading. Good conversation. Taking long walks. Visiting museums. One more thing we now get to enjoy together? Shunning salt. "It isn't a ghastly ordeal," we tell each other. "It's a fun new adventure!"

Actually, it's a ghastly new adventure. But we're making the best of it. I've always characterized our relationship as an ongoing conversation. Now we have a brand new topic! And going grocery shopping gives us plenty to talk about.

"Who knew that there was so damn much sodium in V8? 481 mg per serving! Are they insane?"

"And Cheerios! 140 mg of sodium? Really?"

"The folks who make this chicken noodle soup are obviously trying to kill us."

There's stealth salt, we've discovered, hidden in nearly everything. There's even salt in romaine lettuce! (But only 5 mg, so pigging out on romaine -- if that's what you want to do -- is okay.)

And then there's the joy of finding something delicious with a reasonable salt content.

“We can still enjoy vanilla yogurt! As long as we do it in moderation! Hurrah!”

Although I toyed with the idea of holding a little ceremony in which the two of us threw away our salt shakers and pledged ourselves to a new life, I can't quite bear to part with mine.

I do take comfort in the knowledge that low sodium life is better for us. Experts agree that we should eat no more than 1,500 mg of sodium a day. Instead, most of us eat at least twice that amount. Of course, I was always willing to take that risk. Over-salting my food was one of the few ways for a mild-mannered librarian like me to live on the edge.

This new way of eating is a challenge. But at least I've got company. (And everyone knows that the couple that shuns salt together, stays together.)

But if I ever hear that a meteor is heading toward earth and will destroy us in an hour? I'm going to dust off my salt shaker and spend that last hour enjoying a big batch of Matzoh Brie with as much salt on it as I damn well please. And Mark will be right there with me.

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