Chomping on Chips
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What would the American summertime be without our favorite snack, chips? We’ve got, fried, baked, puffed, kettle, low salt, low fat, potato, corn, whole grain, multi grain, sour cream, barbeque, even jalapeño flavored. The list goes on indefinitely. The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) estimates that Americans get more than 25% of their daily intake from snack foods, and consume 1.5 billion pounds of potato chips in the US. And as you know, these foods, particularly chips, are high in salt, fat and you may be surprised to learn, sugar.

We are neurologically rewarded for consuming salt, fat and sugar and snack companies know this better than us. They engineer food to lure us, ensnare us and create addicts of us all. It may not surprise you to learn that big tobacco, the masters of addictive manipulation, have taken over the snack food industry.

Salt Americans get more than ¾ of their daily salt from processed foods. It’s no wonder. Salt makes things taste better. It’s a “flavor enhancer” so it’s in everything. There are salt receptors not just on our tongues, but all over our mouths even into our stomachs. But we’re not born liking salt, as a matter of fact, babies hate it (but not for long). We’ve been taught to like it, because it’s in everything. Companies use it to prevent bitter metallic tastes in crackers and bread, keep ham from turning rubbery and cover up the “warmed over flavor” of reheated meat. Salt helps hold things together, prevents bacterial decay and helps ingredients mix better. Without salt, these processed food companies would go out of business. So it’s in their best financial interest to keep you hooked, and they know exactly how to do it. Remember the slogan Nobody can eat just one? Don’t they know it.

Fat One serving of regular potato chips (one ounce) has about 10 grams of fat. But how many stop at one ounce? It’s a well-known fact that fat lights up the reward centers of the brain making it unavoidable and addictive. Researchers have used brain imaging to demonstrate how your brain lights up with fat, prompting Unilever to announce that “ice cream makes you happy,” and we all know it does, until you start gaining weight from all your indulgences! But although your brain likes fat, it’s apparently not too good at detecting amounts of fat. In other words, there is no breaking point beyond which you no longer enjoy the taste of fat. “The more the better” is your brain’s mantra. Cookies, soups, pies, cakes, frozen meals and chips, of course, deliver more than half their calories from fat and yet we don’t even notice the fat content. And just to be sure we don’t notice the fat, manufacturers add a bit of sugar.

Sugar We’re designed to recognize sweet foods as nutritious so we don’t just taste sweet on the tips of our tongues. We have receptors in each of the 10,000 taste buds which are also direct links to our pleasure centers. Researchers have discovered sweet taste receptors in our esophagus, stomach and pancreas. You know how much you love those cinnamon and sugar pita or bagel chips! But even the average potato or corn chip contains sugar since it’s used to accelerate the browning process and decrease the time necessary for frying. Food companies
know that if they put sugar in something, it will increase your desire to have more, thus increasing their sales and your waistline. For more great insights, read the new book by Michael Moss, *Salt, Sugar, Fat*, which was the inspiration, and source, for much of this article.

**Chemicals** You may have heard the outcry about acrylamide since it may be a carcinogen, and mostly found in cigarette smoke. But researchers discovered it in certain foods that were heated to high temperatures, like French fries and potato chips. The World Health Organization states the level of acrylamide in these foods poses a “major concern” to our health. High levels of exposure to this compound may result in increased risk of breast and renal cancers, and neurological damage. With the amount of French fries and chips American’s consume, this is only one of our chemical concerns. Another is the genetic modification of foods used to make our chips, particularly corn. But there are actually many possible potential applications for gene technology including modifications to frying oils, acidifiers like citric acid, spices like nutritional yeast and flavorings, particularly cheese flavors made with GMO enzymes.

Taken collectively, there HAS to be something better to snack on than chips. Although you won’t get your sugar, fat or salt fix, try dehydrating fruits or vegetables. One of my personal favorites is sliced zucchini sprinkled with Cajun spice and dried until crispy. Yum. Kids love dried banana slices. Or make your own fruit leather with fresh blueberries pureed and poured into your dehydrator. There are alternatives to snacking on processed foods and the more you can substitute, the healthier you will be.

**Upcoming workshops**

Chetco Health Presentations August’s presentation normally held at the Chetco Activity Center will be replaced in favor of the Applied Nutrition course being offered at SOCC, Brookings campus. See below.

**Applied Nutrition Course**

This 2-day workshop is designed to deliver basic nutrition education and then apply it to disease prevention and reversal. Class will be held at the SOCC Brookings campus on Monday, August 12 and Tuesday August 13, 2013. Participants get two full days of instruction, 170 page manual and 10 continuing education credits all for $65.00. Contact OSU Extension for a registration packet (Curry County 541-247-6672 or Coos County 541-572-5263 ext 292).

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