

# Shaking the salt habit

## Local chef looks to fresh seasoning alternatives

By **KAREN RALLO** *Tribune Staff Writer*

SOUTH BEND -- Shirley Martin sits in a luxurious, pristine dining room adorned with chandeliers and tables draped in white linen. The one thing that seemed to be overlooked in this dining room, was the salt shaker.

A hostess serves her a plate of grilled Chicken with Watermelon Marinade. Martin nods, and tasting it, she says, "Mmm, very good."

This elegant luncheon was recently served to residents at Trinity Senior Living Communities. There was just as much attention given to the ambiance and the meal's plating, as the residents' nutritional needs.

The culinary creations can be attributed to certified executive chef Matt McCall. It's under his watchful eye that daily menus are prepared for the more than 300 residents. He's careful to select fresh, in-season offerings. In addition, he gives the residents a selection of three different entrees.

Some of us find it difficult to prepare a healthy, homemade meal for a family of three, but McCall has to satisfy a variety of diets, tastes and even cultures, all while remembering to keep it healthy.

"Our philosophy is made-to-order ... and it's 95 percent homemade," McCall relates in an interview after the luncheon. He went on to say that making it from scratch allows him to control the sodium.

McCall takes advantage of the season's fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs to help keep the meal interesting and simple.

"I incorporate watermelon into a salsa (for the grilled chicken). A garnish of fresh herbs on the top gives it a burst of flavor."

He went on to say that the addition of herbs is a great substitute for salt. McCall's number one rule is to take the salt shaker off the table.

Lynette Altman, a registered nurse at Trinity, says she keeps her salt shaker on a window ledge in her home. That way, it's too much trouble to get up and get it or it's even forgotten.

Altman strongly suggests that consumers need to be educated.

"Look for the MSG or sodium in the contents on the package if you're not preparing from scratch. You can also look for lower sodium items. A trick I have when buying soy sauce is to buy the regular

soy and dilute it with one-half water.”

Altman went on to say, “We typically consume 4,000 to 6,000 milligrams of sodium daily. For those under the age of 50, it should be around 2,300 milligrams daily. For those 50 and over, just 1,500 milligrams.

“Too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure and stroke, especially in African-Americans and those over 50.”

Dining out can sabotage a diet, according to Altman.

She suggested that consumers should check to see if the restaurant has a Web site that might include information on its menu and nutrition; split a meal or take half of the meal home for another time; and look for the entrees that include brown rice, broccoli, cauliflower and whole grains for a healthier choice.

Mary Ann Lienhart-Cross, Purdue University Extension educator, has been in the food science advising business for 34 years.

“One thing I always say to people is, ‘Salt is an acquired taste.’ Too many people salt their food and they’re not really tasting the flavor of food.”

She agrees with Altman that when you buy packaged foods, you’re getting more salt than you need.

salt

“If we think about sodium as a mineral, we need it for balance in our electrolyte system. Sodium helps us with the balance of water in our body. It also helps with our muscles, nerves and blood volume (helps maintain the proper amount of blood in our bodies).

“It also helps with our glucose, because everything passes through the (blood) cell walls. It’s like the body has need for sodium, but it doesn’t have a need for a huge amount.”

Lienhart-Cross says we need to realize that some foods naturally contain salt, like celery.

“It’s high in fiber, but it contains sodium.”

She went on to explain that consumers also need to understand “the term salt and sodium are used interchangeably, but are very different. Salt is 40 percent sodium and 60 percent chloride. There are 50 to 60 different minerals and nutrients the body needs to keep on a daily balance.”

Lienhart-Cross says people consume way too much salt, anywhere from 2,300 to 7,000 mg of sodium, or about 1 to 2 teaspoons of salt.

"The average person nowadays really does not need to add any salt to food."

Her advice about cutting back on salt, "First taste the food before reaching for the salt. Remember, there's nothing more insulting to a cook than to reach for the salt before tasting the food."

McCall might agree as he prepares meals for Trinity's seasoned residents. He also keeps in mind the residents previously might have been cooking for their families for several decades.

Residents Ellen Cook, Janette Brubaker, Marjorie Wilson and Martin might say that they're busier now than they were while raising their families. The ladies lend a helping hand at Trinity's market, they perform in a handbell choir and participate in a variety of clubs.

All the women agree on one thing: They don't miss the salt.

"Before I came here," Martin says, "I was eating a lot of steak and potatoes, but I was limiting my salt.

She smiles as she admits, "There's a good variety here," and adds that she appreciates McCall's fresh-approach to cooking.

For his inspiration, McCall visits the [allrecipes.com](http://allrecipes.com) web site. To create a great meal he says, "I'll take the concept for an item from the Web site and incorporate the one thing I've learned from my travels, 'freshness is best.'"

Here are recipes from McCall for a heart-healthy meal.

#### Grilled Chicken with Watermelon Marinade

4-ounce chicken breast

3 pounds seedless watermelon

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup honey

1 teaspoon ginger

1 tablespoon fresh, chopped mint

Salt and pepper to taste

Cut the melon flesh into chunks, discarding the rind. Place the chunks in a large saucepan and over medium heat, cook for 2 to 3 hours, stirring occasionally or until the melon is the consistency of applesauce.

Add remaining ingredients to make marinade and mix well.

Place chicken in marinade for at least 2 hours (refrigerate) and grill. Garnish with fresh mint and additional diced watermelon.

## Strawberry Slaw

2 cups coleslaw mix

½ cup chopped celery

½ cup chopped green pepper

### **Dressing:**

3 cups strawberry yogurt

2 tablespoons lemon juice

2 tablespoon honey

Mix dressing together and mix with the coleslaw. Garnish with fresh sliced strawberries.

## Grilled Vegetable Potato Skins

2 large baking potatoes

1 cup sliced yellow summer squash

1 cup sliced zucchini

½ large red pepper, julienne

½ large green pepper, julienne

1 small red onion, cut into ¼-inch wedges

¼ cup reduced-fat Italian salad dressing

1½ teaspoons Canola oil

½ teaspoon salt, divided

¼ cup shredded, reduced-fat Cheddar cheese

Pierce potatoes several times with a fork and place on a microwave-safe plate. Microwave on high for 18-20 minutes or until tender, rotating the potatoes once. Let stand until cool enough to handle.

In a large, resealable plastic bag, combine the vegetables. Pour salad dressing over the vegetables. Seal the bag and turn to coat. Marinate for 20 minutes.

Cut each potato in half lengthwise. Scoop out pulp, leaving a thin shell (discard pulp or save for another use).

Brush the inside of the shells with oil and sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon salt. Coat grill rack with nonstick cooking spray. In a grill with medium heat, place potato shells, skin side up, on the grill rack (but not over direct heat). Cover and grill for about 10 minute or until golden brown.

Drain vegetables, reserving marinade. Grill vegetables in a grill basket, uncovered, over medium heat for 10 minutes or until tender. Baste with reserve marinade. Sprinkle potato skins with cheese and fill with grilled vegetables. Sprinkle with remaining salt and grill 5 minutes long or until cheese is melted.

### Lemon Berry Mousse

1 (.25-ounce) package unflavored gelatin

½ cup lemon juice

¼ cup water

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese

1 cup confectioners' sugar

1 cup heavy whipping cream, whipped

1 cup fresh berries, (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries)

In a saucepan, combine gelatin, lemon juice and water. Stir over medium heat until dissolved. Remove from heat and stir in grated lemon zest. Set aside.

In a large bowl, combine cream cheese and sugar. Beat until smooth. Blend in gelatin mixture. Refrigerate 15 minutes or until thick.

Fold whipped cream into cream cheese mixture. Fold in mixed berries and spoon into parfait cups.

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