

Eating Out In Europe & Asia

Many countries including the U.S. have a wide selection of multi-ethnic restaurants. What we are interested in here is the specific national or regional foods you'll run into if you prefer to enjoy the foods of the country you're visiting.

While Americans are slowly catching on to the Mediterranean diet, Europeans have quickly captured the American diet of high saturated fats and high sodium. According to some researchers and writers their change in eating patterns is partially responsible for driving many of the cafes and restaurants in France, Italy, Spain, and Greece out of business. (I think at this writing that I'd guess economic challenges are also partially to blame.)

I suspect too that this has been a transition over a few decades. While working in Paris in the seventies I noted a McDonald's on the Champs Elysees and found it a bit difficult to imagine Paris citizens chatting over lunch at an outdoor McDonald's café, or for that matter a Burger King in Milan, instead of baguettes and wine or pasta with olive oil and garlic.

Sadly to say, that's apparently what's happening. And it's catching the European medical services off guard. A major indicator of the problem is that heart disease has escalated along with other chronic illnesses that are usually associated with excessive dietary fat and sodium levels.

According to the New York Times a while back, the Mediterranean diet in Europe is dying a slow death. Ever since the first arch of

McDonald's invaded Europe, the American fast-food diet has caused epidemic obesity, heart, kidney and liver disease. Called the almost perfect diet by dietitians and scientists, it is being replaced by the "almost perfect" unhealthy diet from the U.S. America has introduced sugar, higher than normal sodium, saturated fats, and high dietary cholesterol via the fast-food joint. In France, where long lunches were normal and where there existed a 35-hour work week at the time, things have turned upside down. The change surprises me since I experienced the slower pace and witnessed the Mediterranean diet while working in Paris in the seventies. I filmed a long documentary for a large American corporation and was given the Cousteau editing facilities for three weeks to edit the film. After a week I wondered if anyone else in France was at work. Local staff would show up around ten or eleven in the morning, then an hour later go to lunch and return around three or four and converse with each other for about an hour and then leave, ostensibly to go home. After a week of that, one of them came into my edit area and said, "We are told you get here at six in the morning and leave around midnight. Why do you work so hard?" I explained that in the American film business we worked on deadlines and no job in the film business that I knew of had eight hour days. He then explained that in France they lived more civilly, that they received more "respect" for working conditions and their lives.

Based on recent articles, I have to believe most of his explanation is no longer valid. And in a way, I feel sorry for them. Much of their lifestyle has changed to something like ours, which is high-paced, frenetic at times, and now consists of an unhealthy diet.

At the time of this writing, the world is in an economic calamity. And France is not immune to it. So some of the collective dietary changes may be due to costs, but if that's true, then it's going to cost them a heck of a lot more in the long run. Throughout France many well-known cafes and restaurants are closing. They couldn't fill their seats and they went bankrupt. One reason given is that many French are just too satisfied with the fast-food, either for taste, or for their purse. No matter, they are in dietary trouble.

In the New York Times story, one of the bits was that French waiters were becoming unsettled to the point of not wanting to serve their meals as listed on menus, that is, when requested by a customer to adapt or alter or cut down what the restaurant's offering. The waiters reacted with indignation and rudeness, the article stated, and not just to tourists but locals as well. According to the NYT article, "Some diners are being asked to leave a restaurant if they decline a starter and instead

ask to go straight to the main course.” These actions have contributed to a major change in French eating patterns.

And therein lies your challenge while traveling to and eating out in France and probably in other European countries. With the treatment waiters are dishing out in France, I suspect you might have more of a problem where to eat, than what to eat. How many times can waiters chase customers away before a restaurant disappears?

The indication here is that the culture of Europe is changing and if you travel there now, you’ll more than likely find yourself in a maze of dietary chaos. Still, you have to take care of your health, not theirs. I don’t mean to make that sound crass, but let’s face it, whether they were, or are going through a change or not, you still have to eat for your health.

Most all of the recommendations thus far mentioned for U.S. Restaurants work in Europe as well. However, you will come across items not customary in the U.S. even if you’re into the Mediterranean diet. The language barrier alone may prove burdensome if you don’t speak their tongue, but I’m going to assume you have that handled.

When I traveled through Italy and France I was able to get the Italian chefs to prepare pasta without using salt.¹ Garlic and olive oil became one of my favorite “dressings” for a pasta dish.

Breakfast and lunch became my real challenges. Eating breakfast out anywhere is a challenge, including in America. So, while in Europe, where it’s a tad tougher than the USA, I must confess that I lost weight. It’s not hard to guess that I’m strict with my diet, so if they didn’t have anything I could eat, I didn’t eat — and like I said that was before I developed heart disease. Back then I guarded against high fat foods as well as salt content. I do the same today, but with more knowledge of just how to get it “my way.”

The following attempts to list foods generally offered by each country listed. (Not all countries in Europe are listed here.) Check the nutrient data table at the end of the book for foods on the road. We’ve tried our best to gather the nutrient information you’ll need.

Just as in America, each region or local area of any country you visit might have their own unique varieties of meals and different foods or ingredients. Also, most countries these days have a variety of ethnic restaurants ranging from Asian to American, Italian, Hispanic and so on.

Etiquette Tips: Credit Cards are good but in many small foreign restaurants they want cash. Ask before ordering. Most places you pay at the table and tips are generally included in the bill or you’ll find a

value added tax of around 15%. Still, they expect a cash tip of from 5% to 10% depending on the size of the bill.

France

The French use lots of saturated fats (cream sauces, butter, cheeses, etc.) yet, they have a lower rate of heart disease than Americans. Some credit the red wines they consume with each meal but we now know that's not true. Research has shown that it would take about twenty to thirty bottles of wine to equal the level of resveratrol now hyped as the key ingredient of red wines for "heart help." Instead, the French have fewer overweight and obese people than Americans. Sixty-four percent of Americans are overweight or obese. And the French are more physically active than Americans. Both of these factors weight heavily in favor of the French. The French have also traditionally eaten much less in the way of Trans Fats foods (snacks). French in the south however, are healthier than the French in the north. Southern French use much more olive oil while the northerners use butter.

No matter where you visit however, north or south, the French will offer you wine with practically every meal. Or wine, cheese and bread (often baguettes). You might even be invited to join them in a daily drink of their glass of wine. There in lies another healthy French trait. Those who drink wine rarely smoke and many of the wine drinkers prefer to eat fresh vegetables and beans. Possibly you could join in on that part of it and indeed, that would not only be healthy, but offer an opportunity to eat without salt.

Many of us can't enjoy the wine because of medication interaction or for other reasons. And the cream sauces, cheeses and gobs of butter used in their meal preparation should be avoided as best we can.

Breakfast — In hotels and cafes in France, breakfast seemed always to be a croissant or baguette provided with lots of butter, and coffee with lots of milk in it. The "coffee" is known as Café au Lait. I was glad that I had taken enough "breakfast bars" that I made on my own to survive that meal. (I also had some commercial granola bars with me and they came in very handy for both my crew and me.) A few times I was able to get two eggs scrambled and orange juice that was surprisingly fresh. I avoided all breakfast meats. A commercial croissant has about 300 mg of sodium and for many of us that's a bit too much. If it fits into your diet however, then check the nutrient data tables in the back of the book for the fats, calories, and carbohydrates.

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Lunch — Once the main meal of the day for the French. I got into the habit of ordering a salad or fresh vegetable plate (no dressing, please, other than vinegar and oil or fresh lemon juice on the salad). You might run into really fresh vegetables in some places. One of my favorite spots, a hostellerie, Les Terrailleurs, in Biot, served fresh veggies in a “bucket,” so fresh they still had the greenhouse soil on them. (I used my drinking glass of water to wash them off. Later the French waiter said the soil had iron and other nutrients in it. I wasn’t sure if he was pulling my leg or not, but his explanation didn’t stop me from washing them.) They billed me for what I ate. You’ll also find a plentiful supply of French baguettes. (A fresh French baguette has approximately 195 mg of sodium per slice (1 ½” x 2” or 1.1 ounces).

Dinner — Late evening meal, but not as late as the Italians (See below). French restaurants are not at all like American restaurants. You might find yourself sitting at a table with people you don’t know and who don’t speak your language, or you could find yourself at a table alone all evening or, surprising me greatly, with someone’s dog as though the two of you are in a cartoon. I sat at a table for four and a dog jumped up on the opposite chair and panted through my entire meal.

The French use the term *a la carte* literally. Most good restaurants serve appetizers, soup, seafood, meat, vegetable platters or dishes, salads, desserts and cheese (fromage). I ate often in a Basque restaurant close to the Cousteau editing labs where I worked and ordered unsalted lamb with fresh vegetables. They did a marvelous job for me. Basque restaurants are not unusual in Paris.

Italy

Breakfast — Italians serve anything from bread and jam (or honey), to a generous selection of meat, cheeses, cereal, eggs, fruit juice and cappuccino.

Lunch — Places to find lunch include small cafes known as *rosterie* or *paninoteca*. You can find sandwiches, salads, focaccia. Pizza is available throughout Italy, but the sodium and fat levels are pretty high. It’s the same with their bread.

If America’s hamburger is what the world knows us by, pizza is Italy’s signature meal. In Italy you’ll find that pizzas are generally not

at all like those in American pizzerias. Italian pizzas are made with a very thin crust and each pizza is made for a single serving — about 8 to 10-inches across. Unlike American pizza parlors, you don't get to choose your topping. You order what's on the menu and that's what you get. You can figure for a ten-inch pizza with just mozzarella and some sauce about 2400 mg of sodium. In Italy, that's a single serving. Pasta is always available and many will cook it without adding salt. Use a light olive oil for dressing along with some minced garlic. Italians have plenty of garlic on hand as well.

Dinner — Late hours define Italian dinners and ristorante (restaurants) usually don't open until around 8 P.M. Their busy hour is around 9:30 to 10 P.M. If I stayed up that late and ate, I'd have to stay up all night. About the only thing I figure that is safe in a ristorante is the gelato, which is like sherbet but is their version of our ice cream. (About 69 mg sodium per half-cup.) They use milk instead of cream when making it. The Italian dinner consists of appetizers, pasta, a main dish and then the desert (Dolce). You can order pasta as your main dish and they won't throw you out. Ask them to make it without salt and most will.

Spain

Breakfast — Toast and jam seem primary, not unlike Italy. You can figure that a single slice of toast has about 250 to 350 mg of sodium. The jam will have very little. Spaniards also might serve a pastry called churros. Churros are deep fried doughnut like pastries, made often from potato dough. Too high in fat to consume, but a bite won't kill you and they are tasty. Have someone standing by to eat the rest of it. Spain also serves lots of ham, potatoes, sausages.

Lunch — Served about 1 P.M. Check before going. Spaniards are a bit unique when it comes to restaurants and meal times. Some eateries may be exact with their time, be open for only a few minutes, then shut down. You can still get breakfast around lunch time in many places. Meals are also not like what you may be accustomed to. The Spaniards serve a single meal in multiple courses such as serving the meat, then vegetables, etc. Lunch is the large meal of the day. It will prove difficult to get what you want as far as no-salt or low-fat.

Dinner — Typically not served before 9 P.M. Dinners are usually

small affairs. You'll hear the word tapas and find typical meals to be something like fried chorizo on bread. That will be a typical tapa. In Basque country tapas are known as pinxtos. All of which means that in Spain, finding a low sodium low fat dinner will be difficult. You will find the following throughout Spain as well: Roast suckling pig, (Cochinillo Asada), Pulpo a l Gallega (Galician Octopus), Gazpacho (cold tomato soup), patatas barvas (fried potatoes in spicy sauce). All very tasty. All out of reach if you're to stick on your low sodium low fat diet. Spain as you can see, is a challenge when seeking a no-salt or low-sodium meal. It's a case where you might need to get local assistance for restaurant recommendations.

Great Britain

On a trip to London when I worked a very fast-paced ten days, I carried a good supply of my own food. Lots of homemade trail mix (no salt by the way), and the standard homemade breakfast bars. I had a few other edibles along as well. I put all those in a large camera case (metal) knowing they'd be well protected. You could also take along "backup" food if not for meals, then for survival as far as your low sodium target goes. I had already been to London on another project and learned the hard way that British cooking isn't exactly the way I like to eat. Fish and chips could easily out pace McDonald's for saturated fats and sodium and what they served in some of their restaurants remains beyond description. Possibly that was because I didn't get a chance to frequent fancy eateries, but nevertheless, it was a struggle on my first trip. I lost fifteen pounds in just ten days. (I was working physically hard and not eating much.)

You are about to learn why heart disease is the leading cause of death today in England and Wales.

Pubs and cafes are where you find the cheapest meals but not the best chances for getting a dish served without high saturated fat levels, salt, or too much sodium. You'll run across menu items like Shepherds' Pie (lamb, veggies and mashed potato), Cottage Pie (beef, veggies, mashed potato), Gammon Steak with egg (ham and eggs), Ploughman's lunch (cheese, pickle, pickled onion and bread), Bubble and Squeak (leftover veggies, potato, cabbage, peas or carrots sometimes, cold chopped meat), Pie and Mash (London dish of minced beef, green non-alcoholic liquor, mash), bangers and mash (sausages), Cumberland sausage (lots of sausage coiled up like a rope), toad in the hole (sausages swathed in batter and roasted), or the standard pub breakfast of eggs,

bacon, sausages, fried bread, mushrooms, baked beans. These are not healthy meals. So we suggest you do your homework and plan ahead for eating. It's not going to be easy. And don't trust to finding an "American" restaurant. They might advertise as such, but if Americans aren't running it, you'll run into much the same high fat and sodium as you will in the British restaurants.

Tip: You can find lots of Indian restaurants in London.

Breakfast — (Usually between 7 and 9 A.M.) Traditionally known as "Full English," or "The Full English Fry-up." Outside of the sausage fare, a traditionally simple breakfast might include a bowl of cereal, a slice of toast and a fruit juice, usually orange. Also, a cup of coffee. The cereal you'll find in GB is high in sodium, but some places actually have Spoon Size Shredded Wheat, which has about 2 mg of sodium per cup. A poached egg might prove better for you if you can't find low sodium cereal. If you're in a hotel you might find life quite a bit different with servings of Danish, or a croissant, (sausages, and fried eggs are also offered. You'll learn what bangers are as well.) You can find our version of the British Bangers in our No Salt, Lowest Sodium International Cookbook on pages 61 and 62.

B&B or farmhouse offerings for a "great English breakfast" might include bacon, Lincolnshire sausages, Cumberland ham, eggs, kippers, kidneys, black pudding, oatcakes from Staffordshire, hot buttered toast, and fresh jam.

Not exactly a no-salt or low-fat offering.

So, what can we the tourist get for breakfast in London that's heart-healthy? Believe it or not we found a variety of choices for fresh juices, fresh seasonal fruit including melons, papaya, pineapple and at the same time fruit flavored yogurts. These constitute a healthy breakfast. Additionally, the Brits put together a nice hot chocolate drink and of course there is always the ubiquitous tea. (Some chocolate mixes have lots of salt in them. Ask what they are using for their chocolate before giving yourself a sodium shocker.)

The general offerings for breakfast sometimes are limited to a small selection of cereals (all with added salt), and granola, or muesli with salt-added. Bagels are also available along with the popular croissant (7 grams saturated fat, 285 mg sodium for one bagel). Occasionally you'll find yogurt parfait. Eggs (poached, scrambled, or fried are usually available).

If you're with a tour group or on your own, you may find yourself caught up in places that specialize in a high-fat and high-sodium brunch

where you will most likely find everything prepared and ready for you. That can prove to be a nearly overwhelming challenge for low-sodium and low-fat lifestyles.

Tip: Some tour managers will call ahead and ask for different preparations for you. You can often make those arrangements when you first book the tour.

If you're operating on your own, and you get a tip from a local about a good place to eat breakfast, make sure to get the address or at least the neighborhood it's in. London cab drivers are pretty good at finding places. For many of the "London Black Cabs" fans, "On The Knowledge" still exists. Of course, with GPS now available worldwide, practically anyone can be a cab driver in London without having to go through the lengthy training the historic Black Cabs drivers experienced. (I filmed one of those drivers and a student at work. Their efforts were impressive and their devotion to driving those cabs was deep. By the time those drivers finished their schooling, they knew every knook and cranny of London and got you straight to where you were headed.

Lunch — (12 to about 1:30 P.M.) Pre-Packaged sandwiches with crisps (potato chips), abound as do fish and chips. The English might refer to a sandwich as a "butty" or "sarnie." The variety of combinations offered might seem a bit strange to you. For instance we found shrimp (prawn) and mayonnaise. Not a healthy choice. Mayonnaise (78 mg sodium per tablespoon) seems to be used everywhere. The combination of bread, mayo and whatever is packed in with them will all bring the sodium level up to and often higher than a thousand milligrams of sodium per sandwich. Look out for their ham and pickle sandwiches as well.

Lunches are served in many pubs. We got through the maze of chicken, bacon, sausage, onion, cheddar, and chutney sandwiches the first few days by taking my homemade bread into a place we found. They lightly toasted it on the grill, then served thin slices of unsalted steak and onion (but not without a chuckle or two). Needless to say, after a few days the bread looked as though it had been traveling a bit. Others in our party got the same sandwich but often with Ciabatta² or a similar type of bread. You'll also find Omelet's cooked to order and always served with crisps or a bean salad. Avoid things like jacket potatoes, curly fries, and cheese. Cheese might appear in many of their luncheon servings and all of it is high in saturated fats and sodium.

Britain's traditional lunch consists of roast beef and Yorkshire pud-

ding. The pudding is eaten with the main dish. It is not a dessert. It is made from flour, eggs, milk, salt and is baked in an oven. A one-ounce serving of Yorkshire Pudding, also known as Dutch Baby contains about 63 mg of sodium. (See nutrient data table, back of book.)

Dinner or Supper (Traditionally known as “Tea”) — (6:30 to 8:00 P.M.) Bangers (pork sausages) appear again at dinner in many places. You will also see steak and kidney pie, chicken salads, and Cornish pasties with chips, beans and salad. Roast meats can include beef, pork, lamb or chicken. Sometimes duck, turkey, and goose are offered.

Dinner hour can prove to be difficult. It’s challenging for a few reasons. The first is each country has a unique spread of food and we would like to try it. That’s okay if we take only a few bites, but if we sit down to a full high sodium course, then we are presented with the second big challenge. We could cause a huge sodium bounce, and that can present other problems for those of us who can’t eat salt. A steady diet of high sodium on a long trip can challenge our chronic illness whether it’s hypertension, Meniere’s, Lupus, or heart disease. If we have progressed, as many of us on a no-salt, low-sodium do, then we might bring about a reversal.

You can find lean steak in some places, but you’ll have to get them to broil or grill it and make sure it’s fresh and not marinated. You may find some inexpensive places for dinner with interesting menus such as duck with sweet potato and leek gratin, pork filet with mash and caramelized apple, salmon with noodles. All interesting, but all part of the temptation we need to control or at least minimize. Duck and goose are tasty, but you can bet they have also been marinated in a high-salt sauce or mix.

When eating in a British restaurant, dessert is generally referred to as “afters.” Appetizers are known as “starters,” which is also used in the U.S. Lots of phyllo (also filo or fillo) pastry items can be found with starters, but careful. Phyllo dough is usually very high in sodium having 133 mg per a 1-ounce sheet, which is about what each dessert might use, but unless you ask you won’t know. Some use more than one-ounce of phyllo, often adding enough sodium to make the dessert add up rapidly. A menu might suggest “Filo pastry filled with smoked chicken, foie gras and mushrooms.” Phyllo is also deep-fat fried with many offerings.

Germany

Germany has a large variety of restaurants from Greek, Italian, Turkish and lots of Chinese. Many Americans order take-out pizzas or have them delivered and they are generally Americanized pizzas. But the sodium is too high to consider.

For budget traveling, the types of German eateries you find may be cafes or a combo pub like a café/restaurant. Most will offer local versions of German meals and just as you would find in America, many German restaurants pin up their menus outside the entryway where you can review them before walking in (it's the law). Germans have a "restaurant etiquette" you may want to learn. The most important one is: don't snap your fingers for a waiter.

When eating out in Germany you may discover that you have to pay for a glass of water. A good meal at this writing costs around 20 Euro although you can find some "on the cheap" eateries with meals at five to ten Euros. If you prefer to buy your food in a market, you might get by on a day's worth of eats for about five to six Euros.

Tea is as traditional in Germany as it is in England. The plethora of sausage kiosks or stalls will amaze you. Germans love their snack bars that you might find on each street corner where bratwurst is plentiful as a "take away." (One bratwurst link of about 3 ounces has about 720 mg of sodium.) It's the same in Austria where you might be able to get a steckerfisch, fish on a stick. Look out for the mayo sauce they might offer, it's loaded with sodium. As with most countries, German food is not their mother's food anymore. International influence has worked its way into German food just as they have into our own. Food varies in Germany per region as well. In the south you'll find a lot of Das Sauerkraut and along port cities you'll find fish recipes that include lobster, eel and crayfish.

Breakfast (6 am to 9 am) — Generally tea, coffee (served with cream or condensed milk and sugar), or a fruit juice served with toast and marmalade jam. Also available throughout Germany for breakfast is fresh fruit.

Lunch (Noon to 2 p.m.) — Big meal of the day. If in the afternoon it's Nachmittagskafee (or afternoon coffee) or you'll hear Kaffee und Kuchen (coffee and cake). Afternoon food includes only pastries, tarts, cakes with cream base. Today you'll run into this practice mostly on Sundays although it had been a traditional everyday event. For week-

days the corner stalls become very crowded. Also served are pork (leg or ribs), rolls or bread, potato salad or chips.

Dinner — (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) — Mostly cold cuts, bread or a soup and sometimes a warm entrée. Cold cuts are high in sodium.

Hong Kong

American restaurants can be found practically on any street in Hong Kong. Don't be surprised if you go into one only to find Chinese food. Often your hotel might have the best restaurant within walking distance. Hong Kong by the way, is famous for its many eateries and their food.

Breakfast (24 hours) — The Flying Pan is at 9 Old Bailey Street in Hong Kong. Their variety of food and ability to fix things your way (no salt, etc.) is probably tops in the city. You can get an expansive or small breakfast with enough regular or decaf coffee refills to keep you near the restroom for the rest of the day. Prices are excellent at the Flying Pan.

The only bread known in China, as native Chinese bread, is the steamed bun, which is from northern China. You can find a recipe for our unsalted steamed bun in our *The No Salt, Lowest Sodium International Cookbook*.

Lunch / Dinner (Noon or 6 p.m.) — It's actually easy to find lunch and dinner at any hour of the day or night in Hong Kong. Meals can consist of shellfish or sea fish. You could spend a very long time taste testing all the regional foods of China just in Hong Kong restaurants. Lunches and dinners are almost always unforgettable experiences even if just for the ambience. However, the meals are always very high in sodium. In some restaurants they can only accommodate you with unsalted steamed rice (made to order), some unsalted steamed vegetables (made to order) and sometimes unsalted sea fish, again prepared to your order. Shellfish is out of our diet generally because shellfish already comes with a high dose of sodium. If you want shrimp in Hong Kong, it will be pre-salted. The sodium of an average size shrimp in a restaurant (7.25 gram weight) is about 36 mg. One-cup or 145 grams weight would be 721 mg sodium.

Definitely avoid soy sauce and marinated meats or fish.

Japan

I wasn't prepared for Japanese food when I first arrived in Tokyo. Raw fish including fish heads were plentiful. Fried rice, sukiyaki, sushi and other dishes had not been in my diet up until then. On my first train ride from our base in Mt. Fuji to Tokyo, vendors sold fried rice with fish heads through open train windows to the passengers. In Tokyo I had my first dinner at the Imperial Hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.³

It consisted if mushrooms only. A huge platter of mushrooms. Later, I discovered the delights of sushi, yakitori, sashimi and the other great treats of Japanese cuisine.

The big health secret is that the Japanese don't use much fat in their cooking and consequently they have very low rate of heart attacks but do have a higher rate of hypertension – due to the high sodium content.

Tempura and Tonkatsu are two exceptions to the no-fat uniqueness of Japanese meals. Tonkatsu is pork rolled in breadcrumbs and quickly deep-fried. Tempura is practically any coated food quickly deep-fried in a specially mixed batter. We have two tempura recipes in *The No Salt, Lowest Sodium International Cookbook* (as well as a sushi recipe).

One-ounce of Japanese Kamaboko (fish cake) tempura for instance contains about 224.7 mg of sodium. I don't think I ever ate just one-ounce servings. One-half a cup of beef sukiyaki contains about 381 mg of sodium or more.

Noodles and rice are plentiful. Noodles however are usually dipped in a sauce that is high in sodium. You'll find scores of variations of noodles in Japan, but each seems to use soy or teriyaki sauce, each of which is high in sodium.

Japanese restaurants in Japan work differently than American restaurants in the U.S. Much of their food is fresh and not prepped. However, when you order something like Suki-yaki that is usually prepared at your table, they will want to add teriyaki or soy sauce or a "house blend." Suki-yaki is usually made up with beef (probably marinated) and vegetables, tofu and sometimes vermicelli. If you can call ahead, most good restaurants will set these items aside or let you know if it's at all possible to prepare a dish without the use of salt or sauce.

One dish you won't be enjoying is Sashimi. Sashimi is raw fish eaten with soy sauce. More to the point, raw fish needs to be eaten with soy sauce.

Yakitori is grilled chicken often on skewers with skewered vegetables often leeks. You might be able to get an unsalted, non-mari-

nated chicken in some restaurants for this dish. The dish is excellent if you get the house to use salt free Seven Spice known in Japan as Shichimi Togarashi. It does exist. Seven Spice is usually a mix of black sesame seeds, white poppy seeds, toasted seaweed (nori flakes), peppercorn berries, red chili peppers, orange peel or dried tangerine zest and sansho (pod of prickly ash, dried and ground.)

Breakfast — A typical Japanese breakfast will consist of a bowl of rice, some miso soup and a few pickled vegetables. That is or was the traditional breakfast. Today, things are a bit different. Unfortunately, McDonald's has taken over Japan as well as European countries. And Egg McMuffins abound wherever there is a Golden Arch. Japanese have also adopted toast and yogurt, or coffee and a boiled egg or in some areas, a small salad. Miso soup is also known as tofu miso soup. Miso is a paste made from soy beans. The soup is a combination of broth and miso paste. Cancel the soup on your trip. One cup contains 986.1 mg sodium.

Lunch — White rice dominates again. Lunch is often a rice dish or noodle dish. Noodle dishes are favored in Japan. The noodles are fairly low in sodium, but the broth or soy sauce often used aren't. You can get some places to cook the rice for you without salt or sauce. Most have some fresh vegetables they could steam and add to the rice or noodles. Also garlic and onion is available.

Dinner — Other than the dishes listed at the head of this section, Japan does offer a large variety of other meals. You'll be able to find American dishes anywhere you go, including hamburgers (look out for the teryiaki they might add). Japan also boasts French, Italian, Indian, Korean restaurants and familiar dishes. In the higher-end restaurants the chefs will often adjust a menu item for your no salt tastes.

(Footnotes)

¹ At that time it wasn't necessarily for my health, but because I never liked the bite of salt I always asked them to cook without it. Little did I understand back then the amount of salt used in other ingredients.

² A single Ciabatta bun can contain upwards of 1,000 mg of sodium.

³ The Imperial Hotel no longer exists.