



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Papadum dangerously overloaded with Sodium

Papadum, a crispy thin cracker, served with Indian meals is dangerously overloaded with sodium.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the Ministry of Health to set limits for sodium in papadum in view of its high sodium content. It should direct Customs Department to check all imports and the dangerous levels of sodium in papadum.

Consuming high amount of sodium causes high blood pressure, increase the risk of stroke and heart attacks, the leading causes of death and disability in our country.

In a laboratory test conducted by CAP on 11 samples of papadum, all the samples tested contained more than 1,000mg/100gm of sodium of which 4 samples contained more than 2,000mg/100gm of sodium.

Papadum is made using different types of flours and with various preservatives and additives such as artificial flavours and colours.

Papadum enhances food flavour and taste but it is harmful to health due to the high sodium and other preservatives content.

In the South Indian style of eating, especially for lunch it will not be deemed complete without papadum.

It is a staple in every Indian household. It is not only used to enhance the taste but also add that extra crunch to sambar (a type of dhal or lentils curry) or rasam rice.

A papadum weighs approximately 13grams per piece. Assuming 5 pieces of papadum is consumed with each meal, you would have consumed 1,300mg of sodium from the papadum in one meal.

If you add the sodium consumed from the other foods in the meal you would have easily consumed more than 2,000 mg of sodium which is the World Health Organisation (WHO) limit for the daily intake of sodium.

The Ministry of Health estimates that the average Malaysian adult consumes 7.15g of salt in a day which is above the amount recommended by (WHO).

According to the Health Ministry, it is estimated that one in three adults suffer from high blood pressure. It also estimates that one out of five adults may already be having high blood pressure but have yet to be diagnosed. Having high blood pressure puts one at risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney failure. Scientists believe that salt increases blood pressure because the sodium attracts water and causes fluid retention. The additional fluid retained expands the volume of blood in the arteries, which then puts pressure on the walls of the blood vessels, resulting in elevated blood pressure.

Besides the high sodium content, there are other health hazards such as the spices in the papadum which can cause acidity, if consumed in excess.

While the papadum may come across as a harmless thin crunchy food item, if consumed in excess the dough used in making the papadum can stick to the intestines causing constipation, hyperacidity and gas in some cases.

Papadum is crunchier if they are fried, and most Indian households prefer frying them over roasting. The oil which is consumed along with the fried papadum can lead to ill effects such as atherosclerosis and other cardiovascular diseases.

Contrary to the popular belief that roasted papadum are healthier over fried ones, a research has shown that when papadum are roasted or fried, acrylamide, a probable carcinogen or cancer-causing substance, is formed due to its alkaline salt (sodium benzoate) content.

The ways in which the papadum are made are another concern. After being rolled out and sun dried, usually in the open, they are exposed to many air pollutants. Also the surfaces that they are kept on while drying could have a large variety of micro organisms which can further contaminate it.

Papadum adds variety to the palate and the beautiful crunch is loved by everyone, but it's good to consume it in moderation.

In view of the high sodium content detected in the papadum sold in the market, CAP calls on the Ministry of Health to limit the sodium content in papadum. In the meantime, consumers should refrain from eating papadum until such limits are imposed.

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