

# Food for thought

How the traditional Japanese diet is linked to longevity and better overall health.

BY TIFFANY THORNTON

**I**T'S hard to imagine that over 20 years ago the word sushi was an obscurity. The notion of eating raw fish repulsed many. I distinctly recall when I was about 10 years old my father taking me to one of the first Japanese restaurants in Toronto and ordering me chicken. When it was presented to me it seemed a bit suspect. I ate it, contemplated the texture, and knew something was amiss; my dad fessed up and said it was in fact eel. Slimy, slithery eel! I was mortified and yet intrigued. The strange thing is that rather than being turned off for good, the opposite happened. That is when my love affair with Japanese food and culture began.

The land of Japan is an ancient one made up of mysterious legends, Samurai warriors and the longest living people on the planet. Life expectancy may vary by regional prefecture, but the Japanese do endeavour to cultivate a long life. It was not always that way. After World War II, Japan had one of the lowest life expectancies in the world. It became evident that it was not genetics that created longevity, but in fact it was diet that tended to determine the length and quality of one's life. When I am in Japan visiting friends



MT. FUJI VIEWED FROM BEHIND CHUREITO PAGODA.

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**RECIPE**

**Ganmodoki (Tofu Patties)**

4 SERVIINGS | PREP 30 MINS (PLUS 8 HRS TO SET)

**INGREDIENTS:**

- » 1 block extra firm tofu
- » 1 egg
- » 2–3 tsp finely chopped carrot
- » 2–3 tsp finely chopped green onion
- » 1 tsp finely chopped fresh coriander (optional)
- » 2 tsp corn starch
- » 1 tsp sugar
- » 1 tsp salt
- » 1 tsp soy sauce
- » Cooking oil for deep-frying
- » Dipping sauce: Soy sauce (grated ginger, optional)

**TO PREPARE**

Drain the tofu. This is important. To drain tofu, place on a plate. Wrap tofu in kitchen towel and put something flat on top of it (like a chopping board). Then put something heavy on top (like a big bowl of water). Leave it in refrigerator overnight. This will remove the moisture from the tofu.

Pre-boil the carrots to make them a bit softer. Mix all ingredients (except the cooking oil) in one big bowl and mix until a firm consistency (firm enough to make patties). If the mixture feels too soft add a bit more cornstarch. Make patties out of the mixture, about 2 inches in diameter. (Tip: wet your hands first—it is easier!) Deep fry on medium heat until golden brown.

Then it's ready to eat! Dip in soy sauce, or another option—grate a little ginger and add to the soy sauce for extra punch when dipping. **Z**

I find I never eat better, sleep more soundly or feel more connected to what I ingest. For me, implementing a similar dietary experience here is crucial to my well-being.

One of the advantages of living right next to the Atlantic Ocean is the abundance of fresh local fish, which is a key component on the path towards longevity. The Japanese collectively consume 12 percent of the worlds fish, yet account for only 2 percent of the worlds population. They make sure they are all loaded up with Vitamin A and Omega-3 fatty acids, which are known to help ward off cancer. It is not just the fish obsession that helps the Japanese have far lower obesity rates and chronic diseases like heart disease and osteoporosis. In reality it is the protein-rich, low fat, high-carb foods filled with a ton of antioxidants that western diets significantly lack. Additionally, although red meat is eaten in Japan, it is not a main source of protein, as its known to be attributed to long-term heart disease and stroke.



Some other essential ingredients in the Japanese diet are tofu, soybeans, miso, yams, seaweed and rice. Drinking oolong tea (green tea), in addition to pure matcha tea (the traditional tea used in ceremonies) are also a staple of the lifestyle.

Another remarkable fact is that many Japanese are lactose intolerant and adhere to the complete elimination of dairy milk, opting for soy milk and soy products instead.

They feel the long-term use of dairy can cause an earlier death.

The truth is that eating right is not always an easy feat. We get caught up in the everyday motion and the hectic lifestyles that can sometimes hinder our dietary progress. Following the Japanese approach to eating mindfully and slowing down while incorporating wonderfully healthy food options can only benefit us in the end. Give it a try and who knows—maybe at the age of 105 you will be running in your next marathon! **Z**