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Say 'Olè' to olive oil for crispies and health

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CHEFS say it makes your pakodas more crispy and doctors swear by its health benefits! We are talking of olive oil - the famous export of Spain that is currying favour with Indians.

"There is a gap of knowledge about the properties of olive oil in India. It has one of the highest smoking points," Virender S Datta, president of the International Institute of Culinary Arts (IICA), a chef development institute in the capital, told IANS.

"Olive oil disintegrates into unsaturated fats at 210 degrees Celsius and we Indians generally cook our curries and fry our pakodas in oil at 180 degrees C."

Datta and his team of chefs from IICA demonstrated live how Spanish olive oil could replace traditional oil in Indi-

an kitchens to fry crispies and curries because of its high smoking point, low "bad cholesterol or saturated fats" and zero transfat content.

Olive oil can be used almost for everything, Datta said. "It can be used as a traditional salad dressing or for shallow cooking - to make paranthas, pakodas, cakes, fried sweetmeats, tartlets like papri for chaat and pastries. It can also be used for deep fat fries like curried meat and veggies," Datta said.

Atul Mathur, director of interventional cardiology at the Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre, said his hospital has been advising heart patients to use olive oil as a cooking medium for at least three to four days a week.

"There was no awareness about olive oil even five years ago. Since it has low bad cholesterol or saturated fats, it prevents accumulation of fats



in the arteries. Studies show that people living in the Mediterranean region have low heart disease rates," Mathur told IANS.

Spain is currently the largest producer and exporter of olive oil in the world. It has nearly 5.19 million hectares of olive groves in the countryside with an average annual production of between

600,000 and 1,200,000 tonnes.

Spanish manufacturers are eyeing a bigger slice of the Indian market since "it is the segment of the future", a Spanish embassy official here said. History cites that the cultivation and production of olive oil in Spain and the Mediterranean region date back to 1550 BC during the Phoenician era, when Greeks

arrived in Spain.

"The best part is that olive oil makes fries more crispy than other oil. At very high temperatures, the proteins in olive oil coagulate and the natural sugar caramelises forming a protective layer on the surface of pakodas. It prevents the oil from penetrating the soft core, making the surfaces more munchy," Datta explained.

He has been researching the benefits of olive oil and "perfecting Indian recipes" with it. He had rustled up a spread of dahi kebabs, papri chaat, matar samosas, fish kebabs and chicken fried Andhra style with olive oil as the medium at the Spanish ambassador's residence Wednesday. Citing health properties, the chef said the high Vitamin E content makes olive oil anti-allergic.

Studies cite that the high-level of anti-oxidants like Vitamin A and E in olive neu-

tralises cancer-causing radicals. When used with fresh lemon juice, it flushes out toxins from the liver. Doctors also recommend it as a dental cleanser. Olive oil, Datta said, was available in four varieties - extra virgin, virgin, pure and extra light. "Olive oil, like wine, is produced by pressing and crushing the fruits. The first presses yield the best oil - the extra virgin variety or Pomace olive oil which is good for deep fat frying," Datta said. Spanish olive oil is priced around 30 per cent higher than other oils in the Indian market.

But for many the health benefits may outweigh the cost. Dietician Ritika Samad-dar of Max Healthcare at Saket said, "It is best to switch to an oil with low bad fat and high smoking point as India will become the global capital of cardio-vascular diseases by 2020, according to WHO predictions." - IANS