

French cuisine is synonymous with high calories, especially when a sumptuous full-course meal is served. There are, however, exceptions. Recently I attended an elegant French dinner at a Tokyo hotel that served a low-calorie, low-salt menu containing just one-sixth the calories of a typical full-course French dinner.

It was a monthly dinner gathering at the Royal Park Hotel for over 100 smartly dressed women, who were seated at more than 10 round tables pleasantly arranged inside a spacious hall. The atmosphere was vibrant, with everyone anxious to see how the perpetual enigma facing the modern woman today – eating sumptuously while dieting – could be resolved to her satisfaction.

Placed on each table was a unique menu that listed all the ingredients used in each dish, from the hors d'oeuvre to dessert. There was a separate diagram showing the weight of the food, the calorie count, salt content, and the like. As I was going over the informative menu, the dinner got underway. The hors d'oeuvre consisted of “cold-prepared autumn vegetables steamed with coriander flavor,” with the ingredients listed including eggplant, carrots and tomatoes. The materials were fresh to the eye. The dishes that followed were soup of root vegetables; sole meunière topped with vegetables; beef filet wrapped with cabbage, flavored with Japanese pepper; and gazpacho of red fruit, tomato and green pepper. And then there was coffee, and bread was served without butter.



After the dinner, I hesitantly asked chef Iwatsuki to tell me as much as he could, without revealing too much of his secrets, about low-calorie and low-salt cuisine. He was kind enough to oblige me. On the use of salt: Don't sprinkle salt directly on food, but instead dissolve it in water and brush the salted water on the food. If required, brush the salted water several times at certain intervals. On skimping on calories: Use *lo han kuo*, a virtually calorie-free fruit native to southern China, to add a sense of sweetness.

Chef Iwatsuki is thus not only passionate about the culinary art, but also fastidious. He is, in short, a master.

Enjoy Good Food While Dieting

By Ogata Shinichi

A Fastidious Pro

Every time a dish was brought to the table, chef Iwatsuki Akira emerged from his sanctum to give a brief talk about his creation. When beef filet was served, Iwatsuki told us that fat was removed by passing the meat briefly over a flame. No wonder the 60-gram beef filet was tender, packed with flavor, and light on the stomach. The dinner was indeed a delicate and gorgeous feast.

Before the dinner was over, a food inspector walked in and announced the findings of his calorie survey for all ingredients used in the dishes: 300 kilocalories in total and just 2.1 grams of salt. Given that an ordinary full-course French meal contains 1,400 to 2,000 kcal, the low calorie count was a big surprise, and cheers erupted instantly from the hall. A woman in her 60s told me that at first she was skeptical about the concept of the dinner but now she was satisfied: The volume of food was right and the taste was good. That appreciation did not come cheap: ¥15,000 per person. This writer, too, thought the price was steep but acceptable.

Chef Iwatsuki is a long-time student of low-calorie cuisine. After retiring as chief cook at another hotel, he devoted himself to preparing the menu for this monthly dinner. He chose the ingredients with care and applied his low-calorie philosophy to the dishes.

Food Faddism

Japanese people, women in particular, are becoming increasingly conscious about what they eat. So, whenever TV producers and magazine editors run out of stories, they say they can always turn to diet-related features.

Recently, a popular TV program claimed that people could lose weight by eating *natto*, a strong-smelling food made from fermented soybeans, twice a day. It turns out that the data used for that claim was fabricated. After the program, which used to boast a viewer rating of around 15%, was aired, *natto* products flew off store shelves the next day. Some shops even ran out of stocks. After the scandal broke, the program was canned. But many similar TV programs featuring food and dieting are still aired virtually every day.

Takahashi Kuniko, a professor of food science at Gunma University northwest of Tokyo, derided the cancelled TV program as a “symbol of food faddism.” These days, she explains, many people tend to blindly believe that food and nutrition alone are keys to good health. As the entertainment media today is flooded with dieting information, the public must have eyes, as well as taste buds, to discern truth from falsehood. **J.S.**

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