

# Fast forward to fat

ROSE PRINCE

**T**WENTY YEARS AGO, when I began writing about food and the United Kingdom was recovering from an embarrassment of food industry scandals, I hoped, I fervently hoped, that there would be a day when fast-food consumerism would go into decline. It should have. In the years since, industrial-scale contaminations, the use of unhealthy trans fats and other additives, the abuse of the workforce and the ruthless exploitation of suppliers have all been exposed, and the consequence has become clear: an epidemic of obesity.

In the meantime, there have been high-profile campaigns by television stars such as Jamie Oliver and best-selling books such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*; and the medical profession and the government (up to a point) have joined in urging a healthier lifestyle and diet.

But it appears it has all come to nought. I have just read a report saying that the UK has seen a 34 per cent increase in the number of takeaway food outlets between 2010 and 2018. My initial disbelief was speedily replaced by feeling, well, frankly depressed. My hopes have been dashed.

According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics, Britain has the highest number of takeaway outlets on high streets in almost a decade. The greatest concentration of takeaway food shops is in inner cities – not a huge surprise. In 2010, the average number of fast-food outlets per 100,000 people was



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47. Now it is 61. These are simply business service statistics. They do not answer the obvious question: why?

I'd say lack of time is the main culprit – or excuse. Takeaway delivery firms such as Deliveroo must also have had an impact. From your desk, your warehouse, shop floor or even classroom you can order a meal and have it delivered hot by a scooter driver or a panting cyclist.

But it is also about price, education, media influence, allure, greed, addiction and lackadaisical so-what-ishness. What to do? I know I'm sounding hoarse. Maybe history will look back on a generation of takeaway fast-food addicts who destroyed their own health and

record that their progeny learnt from this and changed their habits.

But I hope it won't come to this. We have to make time, slow down to cook something quickly. I claim this recipe to be fast food, only it is you that makes it, not an outlet. It is a compromise between pleasure and nourishment, and it takes just 10 minutes to cook.

## PAKORA

SERVES TWO

### For the batter:

1/2 **tbsp** ground coriander  
1 **tsp** ground cumin seed  
1 **tsp** mango powder (amchar – from Asian shops)  
250g **gram** (chickpea) flour  
1 **tsp** cornflour

**Pinch** of baking powder

Approximately **180ml** water

Tender vegetables (patties of grated potato or sweet potatoes, green beans, courgette, broccoli, asparagus)

Raw bitesize chicken pieces, raw prawns or fish.

**Mix all the batter ingredients together, adding enough water to make a double cream consistency, and season with salt. Heat 1cm of light olive oil in a pan; dip the vegetables or fish/meat in the batter and fry until deep gold. Serve with chutney or yoghurt with chopped mint and green chilli.**

# Glimpses of Eden

JONATHAN TULLOCH

**IMPRISONED** in a concrete culvert, the little River Team passes under the A1 and flows through a trading estate. Somewhere between the Premier Inn and the 24/7 gym, it runs free from its subterranean prison, and glints again under the sun.

I was on a bridge close to here, when I looked down and saw the dipper. Sooty brown with white throat and chest, the bird stood on a rock in midstream, and bobbed up and down in the manner that earned its name. Almost starling size, with a cocked tail, dippers are birds of fast, clean, upland



waters. Suddenly the bird dived, leaving behind only a string of bubbles. It was searching for larvae or shrimps.

Living by quick waters has shaped

dippers. Long legs and sharp toes evolved to grip riverbeds, even in fast flows. Solid rather than hollow bones act like a diver's weights, preventing them from being swept away. High levels of oxygen-storing haemoglobin in their blood, allow dives of up to 30 seconds. Even a dipper's voice evolved from its environment: it is audible above the most turbulent waters.

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