



Why do Sri Lankans love hoppers?

Written by Dr Harold Gunatillake-Health editor

Why are there so many take away street hopper food outlets in Sri Lanka, much more than MacDonald's and KFC's in most other countries? Once, I met a young Australian tourist in Colombo, and when asked whether he was enjoying his holiday in paradise, he said, "I love that 'hopper city' in the holy village down South, the hoppers were fantastic nourishing treats at such low prices" When ask which part of the hopper he preferred.

"Of course the crispy frills, he said, but the fleshy centre with a 'bull's-eye' on top was delicious, but disastrous when the yellow half cooked yolk starts dribbling down the chin. There you are that was the impression of a foreign tourist eating hoppers for the first time.

He was referring to Kataragama village. This guy has been eating egg hoppers daily as the main meal with strong chilies paste (kata sambol) and spicy onion sambol (Seeni sambol) and savouring very much to his heart's content.

One could eat hoppers every day, never gets bored. It is like going to 'Udawalawe' to see the same elephants every year, in a way make no sense taking that risk.

Taste buds of humans get addicted to certain foods like chocolate. **Sugary foods, processed foods filled with sweeteners, and refined carbohydrates, such as bread, pasta, hoppers pittus and rotties, all turn into sugar in your body and spike your blood-sugar levels. New research shows that sugars light up pleasure centres in your brain, just like cocaine and heroin do. This causes addictive cravings for these foods — cravings that we often can't resist.**

You organise a 'hopper nite', the venue would attract crowds of Sri Lankans, will wait in the long queue impatiently just for a hot 'live hopper' on one's plate, and for the second serve you may need to queue up again. Hoppers seem to take a long time to get cooked with brownish crispy frills, and you need a minimum of 10 fire-spots to cook for a small gathering. Also, hoppers need to be enjoyed hot.

Can one explain this phenomenon among the Sri Lankans-world-wide?

The mixture that goes into the batter would be similar to the dough mix made for other varieties such as rotti and indiappans, godas and so on, more a thick liquid

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Health editor

mix of course, but the preferred choice among most would be hoppers any time of the day or season. It's a relief for the parents as most kids love hoppers.

Hoppers are low calorie compared to other similar foods made from rice and wheat flour.

Each hopper mixture contains two table spoons of batter that makes one hopper. The calories from the flour of two tablespoons of batter would be about 25 cal. The coconut milk though it contains saturated fat would add another 25 cal. So all in all, each hopper would be about 50 cal. If you add an egg into the hopper you need to add another 75 cal.

Nutrition Facts about hoppers:

Serving Size 2 tablespoon (28 g)

Per Serving

Calories 30

Calories from Fat 20

Total Fat 5g

Cholesterol 0mg: **Sodium** 125mg: **Potassium** 0mg: **Carbohydrates** 2g: Sugars 1g: **Protein** 0g

Insignificant amounts of **vitamins C, E, B1, and B3, B5 and B6** and minerals: **iron, selenium, sodium, calcium, magnesium and phosphorous** from the coconut milk.

A great health advantage is no oil is used in the process of cooking, except wiping the cooking pan (thatchu) with oil impregnated piece of cloth, unlike preparations like paratha and flat bread.

One would on an average eat three hoppers and you bet you have filled your stomach for your hunger pangs to vanish and you would have consumed less than 200 cal.

A very small amount of sugar is added to the batter and this would be insignificant from calories point of view.

That unique taste of the hopper is mainly due to the added yeast to the mix to ferment and being kept overnight.

Gut Microbes love fermented foods

Feeding your boarders in your gut- meaning the over hundred trillion microbes looking after your health and well-being, love it. Among other functions, they boost your immune system and keep you in trim health. So, eating hoppers even daily have its advantages of the health benefits. These microbes in your gut love in addition these fermented foods, pickles and cultured foods.

How come hoppers are priced according to the grade of restaurant you patronize?

Hoppers are not usually served in the 5 star tourist fancy hotels. It is cumbersome and time consuming, so the chefs would prefer to serve omelettes for breakfast.

If you need to enjoy hoppers you may have to visit the way-side eateries, roti huts and some upmarket restaurants in the main cities, or most enjoyable eating hot hoppers would be from little boutique type of restaurant on the way-side, ordering your quota into your car. Those baby boomer generations will remember in Colombo, in their dress suits after dances would dart at 5 am to the hotel in Bamba junction or the one in Pettah before going home, to enjoy a good feed of hoppers. Of course, those days are gone, now the revellers take a risk in night driving, and the cops are waiting on the road sides with the breathalysers to check your alcohol consumption during the night.

You would not like to patronise these boutiques and sit inside the premises to enjoy the treats. These eateries are not very clean hygienically, but as the food is cooked promptly and eaten you do not have to worry about getting stomach upsets.

There was this up-market famous hopper restaurant in Colpetty complained by someone to the health authorities, finding a cockroach limb in one of the hoppers and the management accepted responsibility with apologies. Such instances are rare.

Way-side little boutique type of restaurants the hoppers are cheap about rupees 20. (20 Aus. cents) per hopper

In the more upmarket restaurants popular for hoppers the price of a hopper would be very much more.

These hoppers are more tasteful because a better quality of rice flour is being used for the mix and you pay for the ambience and the soft music.

Hoppers have been mentioned in political drama, too

Mahinda Rajapaksa, ex-President once said bitterly that Mr. Sirisena had defected after the two men shared a meal of the popular Sri Lankan comfort food, "hoppers" or rice pancakes.

He said his rival "eats hoppers in the night and then stabs you in the back in the morning".

Today, there are many restaurants in Colombo for mouth-watering awesome hoppers and the spectrum is large. People patronise these '*Appa kades*' mostly for dinner, and those who are fortunate to have domestics at home it is a frequent morning pride.

One popular spot for hoppers is the Golf Cub behind Kanatte in Borella. Visit the club on a Wednesday with a club member, you will enjoy, I would say the best hoppers in town, eat any amount for about 500 rupees.

Hoppers soothes your mood

People who eat hoppers are very satisfied and the flavour lingers in the mouth for a while and the satiety enhances your mood. No other food does this, perhaps Chinese Food may. To fulfil ones satiety you need to eat an egg hopper, with a thick egg

centre, and short crunchy side frills. They are most enjoyed with dynamite katta sambol.

Some 5 star hotels in Colombo have hopper nights on Fridays and Saturdays, and with all-inclusive buffet including hoppers costs you about Rs 750 (Aus \$ 7.50)

So the choice is yours where you should go for your next hopper bash