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The handy pita

Program helps keep size of meals within reason

By Ann Marie Bush

The Capital-Journal

Kelly Voth has hopped on the diet bandwagon many times in her life -- only to discover that the diets are too restrictive.

Voth, of Mound Ridge, read about The Pocket Diet in a June issue of Women's World magazine. The diet uses pita pockets to help dieters control portion size, according to pocketdiet.com.

So Voth purchased pita pockets and began the diet. She lost 4 1/2 pounds the first week. The secret, Voth said, is easy.

"It's the portion control that really works," she said.

A pita pocket will hold about 2 to 3 ounces, said George Kashou, co-author of "The Pocket Diet" book and co-owner of Kangaroo Brands Inc., which makes pita pockets.

Caitlyn Lorenze, a registered dietician and co-author of the "The Pocket Diet," said diet is a convenient way for people to eat healthy and have long-term success.



Anthony S. Bush/The Capital-Journal

Pitas can be stuffed with anything for a portion-controlled meal, including this one filled with bacon, cheese and lettuce.

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to people free of charge beginning in May 2004 in celebration of Kangaroo Brand Inc.'s 25th anniversary. Kangaroo Brands Inc. was started in 1979 by Kashou and his brother, John, in Milwaukee.

The free book was based on a study conducted by Milwaukee's Community Memorial Hospital. Thirty-eight people in the group used pita pockets for portion control, Kashou said.

The study lasted six weeks, and the average weight loss per person was 1.3 pounds per week. The most weight lost

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Diet: "The Pocket Diet" book will be

during the study was 18 pounds and the least amount lost was 1.5.

"That's when I got really excited," Kashou said.

He spent the next four months working on the book. About 20,000 copies were printed and distributed free within six to eight months, Kashou said. A publisher called Kashou and loved the idea, he said.

"I didn't know what to expect," Kashou said. "I just wanted to help promote healthy eating. Our business is booming, and it (pita pocket) is becoming much more mainstream. People are just going to love this idea, and they should."

Pitas aren't new for Topekan Cheryl Monteith, who owned The Corner Pocket on S.W. 6th Street for nearly 19 years before she closed the restaurant in August 2004. Monteith specialized in making pita sandwiches.

"That was the backbone of the whole thing," she said. "Nothing worked as well as the pockets. My idea when I started in the business is that I wanted to give people a choice. People downtown who work in the offices are kind of trapped as far as their options for lunch. Pizza, hamburgers or something that had been cooked to death."

And her pitas were popular.

"There were days during lunch that I did as many as 300, if not more," she said. "There were a couple of times that we got so busy that I didn't move away from my sandwich-making area for three solid hours."

That hectic schedule helped Monteith make a decision to close her business. It's a decision she doesn't regret. And as far as eating pitas, she said she had had enough.

But she does agree that pitas are healthy and can be stuffed with many things.

"You can put anything in there," she said.

Denise Eulert, a baker, makes pita pockets regularly for the Millennium Cafe at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 S.W. 10th. The cafe offers a chicken pita sandwich, which is stuffed with strips of chicken, pepper and onion, diced tomatoes and provolone cheese. The cafe, which opened in 2000, has offered pita sandwiches for about four years, Eulert said.

On average, the cafe serves about 30 sandwiches a week, Eulert said.

"They (pita pockets) are not difficult to make, but they do take time," she said.

And for people who are crunched for time, convenience is critical -- so the pre-packaged pitas are helpful.

"Other diets are too much work," Voth said. "This is easy -- it's about portion control."

Ann Marie Bush can be reached at (785) 295-1207 or ann.bush@cjonline.com.

Recipe of the week

Bacon, Cheese and Tomato Pocket

2 ounces low-fat cheddar cheese or Monterey jack, provolone or swiss

2 ounces Canadian bacon or ham

2 tomato slices

Heat meat in microwave for 10 seconds on high. Layer cheese, tomato and meat in pocket. Toast the filled pocket on medium-high and serve. Serves one.

Source: "The Pocket Diet,"

by George Kashou and Caitlyn Lorenze

Other recipes

Creamy Summer Berry Pocket

available at local bookstores in the next two to three weeks, according to the authors. The book can be pre-purchased at amazon.com.

• Price: \$10

• Online: pocketdiet.com.

• About the business: kangaroobrands.com

1/2 cup fresh berries (raspberries, strawberries, blueberries or blackberries)

1 tablespoon whipped cream cheese, low fat

1 tablespoon sugar-free preserves (use a matching berry preserve)

Spread one inside of pocket with cream cheese. Spread the other side with preserve. Add berries and serve. Serves one.

Source: "The Pocket Diet," by George Kashou and Caitlyn Lorenze

Gourmet Chicken Salad

2 skinless-split chicken breasts (10 ounces), roasted and diced

1/4 cup celery

1/4 cup grapes, halved

1/4 cup apples, diced

1/4 cup walnuts, chopped

4 tablespoons low-fat mayonnaise

Mix all ingredients in a small bowl. Salt and pepper to taste. Fill pocket and serve. Serves six.

Source: "The Pocket Diet," by George Kashou and Caitlyn Lorenze

Philly Cheese Steak Pocket

2 ounces beef tenderloin, sliced

1/2 green bell pepper, sliced into long strips

1/2 small onion, sliced

1 ounce Provolone cheese, low fat

1 tablespoon olive oil

Heat oil in skillet on medium-high heat for one minute. Add meat and cook each side about one minute. Remove meat from pan on to a plate and top with cheese. Cover plate with lid of pan or another plate to keep meat warm. Add veggies to same pan and stir until tender. Add salt and pepper to taste. Fill pocket and serve.

Serves one.

Source: "The Pocket Diet," by George Kashou and Caitlyn Lorenze

Pita Bread

2 tablespoons yeast

1/3 teaspoon sugar

2 1/3 cups warm water

5 tablespoons olive oil

5 1/2 teaspoons salt

7 cups bread flour

Dissolve the yeast and sugar in the warm water in a mixer bowl, and allow it to proof three to four minutes. Add the olive oil, salt and 4 cups of flour. Mix well. Continue to add flour and mix until dough is firm.

Cover the bowl with plastic and allow dough to rise for 1 1/2 to two hours. Punch dough down and separate into 10 dough balls. Let dough balls rise on a floured surface, lightly covered with plastic, for 30 minutes. Roll each dough ball into a thin disk about eight inches across. Place on parchment-lined baking sheets (five to a sheet) and let set for 30 more minutes, either covered or in a proof box.

Set the oven to 425 degrees. Place one sheet in the bottom of the oven and bake for five minutes, then switch to top of oven and bake for about three minutes more. Remove when pitas have puffed or blistered. Repeat for other sheets, baking only one at a time. Pitas should be inflated by the end of the four-minute period. Allow to cool, and then gently flatten them and wrap individually.

Makes 10 pitas (or 20 halves).

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Source: Denise Eulert, a baker for Millennium Cafe at Topeka and Shawnee
County Public Library

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