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PATENTS

Low-Carb Version of French Fries

By TERESA RIORDAN

CAN there be such a thing as a healthy French fry? Randy Blaun, a writer and self-proclaimed foodie living in Manhattan, claims to have invented just that: French fries that have as many nutrients and as much fiber as a serving of broccoli.

Moreover — and this should be of profound interest to the millions of Americans following diets like the high-protein, low-carbohydrate one proposed by Dr. Robert Atkins — Ms. Blaun's fries are low in carbohydrates. They have six to eight grams of carbohydrates a serving, compared with 20-plus in a serving of regular French fries.

Ms. Blaun's patent application, published in June, reveals her secret ingredient: cauliflower.

Cauliflower French fries? Well, not just cauliflower. Also egg whites and calcium caseinate, which is derived from milk, and "just enough potato to make it potato-y."

Ms. Blaun has been an Atkins-diet aficionado for a couple of decades. She served as a Web consultant for Atkins Nutritionals Inc., which is a privately held company based in New York that sells products that support the Atkins diet.

"But there is a hole on the plate in the Atkins diet," she said. "Potatoes are the side dish that everyone misses."

For the millions of followers of low-carbohydrate diets, potatoes are a no-no. They have a high glycemic index, which means they quickly raise blood-sugar levels.

Low-carbohydrate bread substitutes, usually of soy and wheat gluten, abound. Ms. Blaun hopes to be the first on the market with popular low-carbohydrate potato products, under the trademark Idaho Lite and ranging from tater tots and latkes to twice-baked potatoes and batter for fried foods.

Ms. Blaun is essentially trying to patent a recipe for a dough, made from a powder, which is then shaped and baked into potatolike form.

If the dough has the cancer-fighting sulfur compounds present in cauliflower, doesn't it also have the strong odor associated with cruciferous vegetables when they are cooked?

"Once it has been cooked thoroughly enough and puréed, it becomes a nice bland substrate," Ms. Blaun said. "It doesn't smell like cauliflower."

To mass-produce French fries with her dough, Ms. Blaun said, "you have to squirt it out of a little nozzle

shaped like a French fry, then you flash-fry it." But can any fried food really be healthy? Ms. Blaun says as long as it is fried in canola oil.

French fries, however, will probably not be her first product on the market, given that the extrusion equipment is a \$25 million investment.

Does Ms. Blaun see a future in, say, green French fries made of broccoli? After all, green ketchup is the rage among the playground set. "We could make even them into confetti colors," she said. "The sky is the limit."

Several other inventors seem to want to catch the low-carbohydrate wave as well. At least a dozen new low-carbohydrate ideas have been published in patent applications in the last six months.

Which is not to say that inventors aren't pioneering other artillery in the war against fat.

In July, for example, a group of inventors in Israel patented a method of weight loss that involves attaching electrodes to the stomach. In June, a California inventor patented a weight-loss laxative whose main ingredient is *E. coli*, a bacteria that causes food poisoning.

Dr. Atkins died earlier this year so Ms. Blaun said she did not have the opportunity to have him try her products.