

Reading Selection

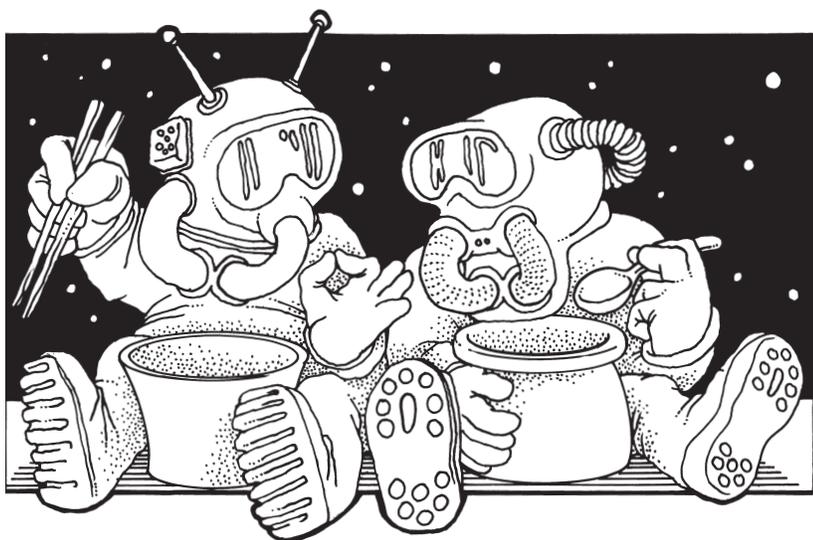
Life without Starch? It Won't Be Easy!



Imagine for a moment that you are an astronaut. You are about to land on a planet that is supposed to have lots of food in a special storehouse. Well, it turns out there is plenty of food. But somehow, none of it contains any starch. As you sort through all that food, you begin to realize that there are no potatoes, rice, bread, beans, or peas. No corn, pasta, or yams. What will you do now?

For one thing, you will have to be extra careful about what other foods you eat.

Starch is the human body's number one source of energy. Without it, the body starts to raid its own energy storehouse; it burns up fat and muscle to get the energy it needs. To prevent that, you will need to eat extra fats and proteins (along with a little sugar) to make up for your lack of starch. What happens if you don't eat extra fats, proteins, and a little sugar? You won't have enough energy even to walk around your space ship. Instead of an explorer, you may end up being an interplanetary couch potato.

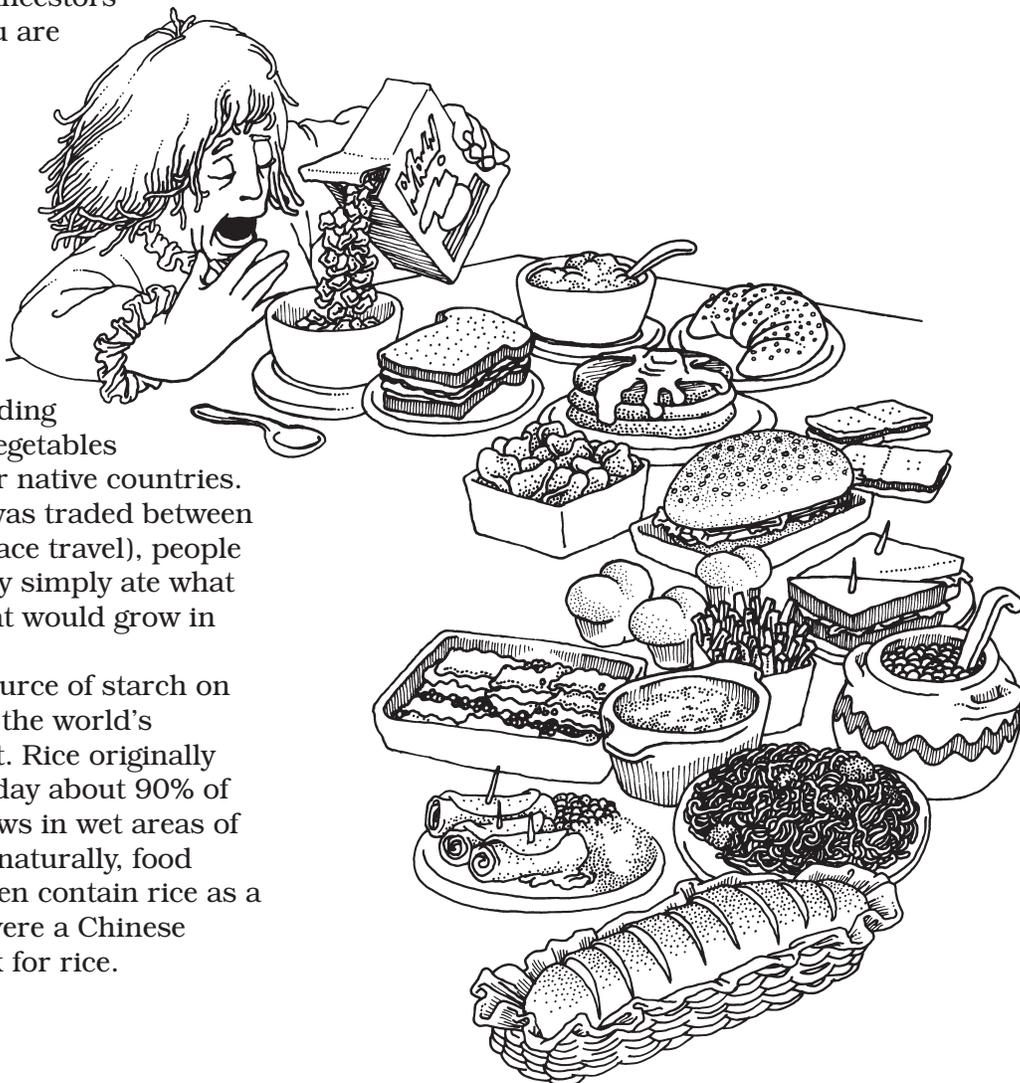


What's Your Favorite Starch?

So, should you call home for supplies? What are your favorite starchy foods? Probably the kind your ancestors liked. For example, if you are an American astronaut, you might ask for bread, beans, or corn. If you are an astronaut from another country, you might ask for special roots, rice, pasta, or beans.

Different people tend to like different sources of starch, depending on the types of starchy vegetables and grains grown in their native countries. In the days before food was traded between countries (and before space travel), people had less of a choice. They simply ate what was around them or what would grow in their soils and climates.

Rice is the principal source of starch on our planet; about half of the world's population depends on it. Rice originally came from India, and today about 90% of the world's rice crop grows in wet areas of the Asian continent. So, naturally, food dishes from this area often contain rice as a main ingredient. If you were a Chinese astronaut, you might ask for rice.



On the other hand, North and South Americans tend to like potatoes. In fact, the potato originally came from Central and South America. Then it was introduced into North America and Europe about the time the New World was settled. Today, potatoes are very popular in food dishes from the United States and Ireland.

Most potatoes are “tubers,” so they grow underground. Another tuber that is a vegetable is the water chestnut. Native to the Far East, it is found in Chinese and Japanese dishes. The sweet potato is not a tuber, but we do eat its thick, starchy roots.

Of course, starch also is found in the wheat, rye, oat, and corn flour that we eat in breads or other products, like pasta. Do you think pasta is an Italian dish? Actually, historians believe pasta noodles were invented in the Orient and brought back to central Europe by the Italian explorer Marco Polo.

Today, many people eat pasta in many different forms. Some athletes eat it the night before the big game as part of a “carbo-loading” plan. (More about that later, in Lesson 8.) What kinds of starch do you eat? Think about it while you’re eating dinner tonight.