

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

"Why are chips called French fries and we are told some of them could be Haraam? How is this possible since they are made from potatoes?" "For years when I have travelled in SA and other countries I have relied on a plate of chips and a soft drink from non Muslim stores when there was no Halaal outlet available." These are some of the queries that we receive on our Helpline on a regular basis.

The name **"French fries"** dates back to the First World War when American and Canadian soldiers, assisting in the liberation of Belgium, arrived in a French-speaking part of the country and were served frietkots. As a result they termed them as French fries though the product had no association with France whatsoever. They are still called Vlaamse Frieten or Flemish fries (southern Netherlands) Pommes frites, frites (French), frieten (Dutch), patatas fritas (Spain), chips (UK). It is the national snack of Belgium and the world's most popular fast food.

So what makes good Belgian chips incontestably the best in the world? Firstly, it is steeped in tradition as the Belgians were the earliest of people that embraced the potato that was discovered by the returning 16th century Spanish conquistadors of the Incas in South America. They regard chips as their national treasure and have the highest annual average consumption per person of fried potatoes of 75kg. They have 5000 vending stands called fritkots in Belgium, a country of only 10 million people.

Secondly, it's the type of potato and method used. Bintje is the variety usually cited. Floury, but flavoursome and slightly sweet, they stand up perfectly to the key secret of Belgian chips i.e. double frying. The oil which must be beef dripping (***graisse de bouef***) is heated precisely to 160°C degrees and the chips are

fried once until pale but cooked through, then left to drain and cool (***tiedir***). Then they are refried at 190°C until golden and (***ben croustillantes***) – crispy. All the best fritkots follow these rules in their quest to uphold the benchmark.

Ramifications on Halaal & Precautions

About one third of potato crops are used to make frozen fries, 80% of which goes to the food services sector and 20% to retail. You will find a proliferation of brands on supermarket shelves including many from abroad. To replicate the taste notes of best French fries the industry incorporates elements of the processes described above.

The use of beef tallow and lard in fries or related products processed in plants is not uncommon. In 2002 McDonalds paid out \$10million to Hindu and vegetarian groups after apologising for failing to make it clear that it used beef flavouring in its French fries and hash browns. The company which has served more than 200 billion portions of French fries around the world, maintained for more than a decade that only vegetable oil was used, confessed to a method of using beef fat to partly fry chips before they were sent to restaurants. They were then frozen and refried on the premises using vegetable oil.

1. It is best to prepare dishes in the confines of your blessed homes with the best of ingredients with your own hands and served in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. There are many wonderful family recipes that one can utilise.

[Click here for a recipe by the executive chef of the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town and the Sunday Times Chef of the year 2012.](#)



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2. If you purchase the frozen ready to fry or bake variety from your local store look for the SANHA Halaal mark.

The following brands are certified by SANHA:

- Frozen Chips produced by Lamberts Food Bay (contracted manufacturer for several house brands)
- McCain's produced by McCain's Food SA
- Natures Source produced by Natures Choice

3. When eating out ensure that the outlet is certified Halaal by SANHA or at least by a reputable body that does not delegate its monitoring function from its monitors to the establishment itself – who guards the guards?

[Click here for a list of SANHA certified restaurants](#)

Why have a chip on your shoulder – when in doubt, leave it out