

'They've been known to surprise us in bed with pancakes and milkshakes'

Vivek Singh

Chef, The Cinnamon Club, London SW1
Lives in London with his wife Archana,
son Eshaan, 13, and daughter Maya, eight.

Like any working chef, I'm not at home all that much, so I make a real effort to have dinner with the family three nights a week – Saturday, Sunday and one weeknight. The rest of the time, mealtimes are down to Archana.

I'll usually cook on one of those three evenings, Archana will do another and on the third we tend to go out to eat. If it's my turn, it's usually an old family favourite, something the children have grown up with – they still get stuck into butter chicken like there's no tomorrow, but it's not all traditional Indian food. Far from it: what with growing up in the west and having a cook for a dad, their culinary influences are far more widespread than mine were at that age.

Eshaan's very like me in his tastes. He loves his meat and poultry; fish, too. Anything so long as it's not veg. He'd probably be happiest if we left a big pot of stewed meat on the stove day and night, so he could just help himself whenever he's peckish. He's a typical teenage boy, essentially. When he was younger, it was much easier to get vegetables into him – we'd just puree loads of the stuff into pasta sauces and whatnot. Now, though, you can forget about it, unless it's unidentifiable as something that once grew in the ground and is concealed by a rich, meaty sauce. He does eat some salad veg and fruit, and bizarrely he's got a real soft spot for beetroot, goat's cheese and walnut salad – your guess is as good as mine as

to why, but I'm not about to bring it up in case he goes off that, too.

Maya's the complete opposite. She calls herself a pescetarian, though right now she's off shellfish. Perhaps it's something to do with Archana, who is allergic to shellfish, and Maya's subconsciously modelling her diet on her mum's. Actually, I say she's a pescetarian, but she'll happily have a salami sandwich in her packed lunch. In my experience, it never pays to second-guess kids' food foibles.

Perhaps the most important family time we have food-wise is weekend breakfasts. During the week, we all eat breakfast and leave the house at different times: the kids usually cram down some cereal or toast while we "help" them look for a missing school tie or whatever. Weekend breakfast, though, is a bit of a family tradition, and poha, a central Indian rice dish, will feature at least one morning. To tell the truth, I wasn't a big fan of poha until I tried my wife's version; now I'm hooked, as are Eshaan and Maya.

Eshaan always demanded scrambled eggs when he was younger, preferably with truffle oil (typical chef's son right there), but when he was around 10, he stopped. Now he's more into American pancakes with all the toppings. Breakfast is also the one meal where the kids like to get stuck in with the cooking – they've even been known to surprise us in bed with a tray of pancakes and fresh fruit milkshakes.



Vivek Singh with daughter Maya and son Eshaan.
Photograph by Pal Hansen.

THE SINGHS' POHA

The greatest spiced breakfast ever. You can buy pressed rice flakes from larger supermarkets, Asian food stores or online.

SERVES 4

vegetable or corn oil 4 tbsp

mustard seeds 1 tbsp

curry leaves 20

red onions 2, peeled and finely chopped

potatoes 2 medium, peeled and cut into paysanne (ie roughly 5cm-diameter rounds about 1cm thick)

salt 1½ tsp

turmeric 1 tsp

sugar 1 tsp

green chillies 4–5, finely chopped

frozen peas 2 big handfuls (optional)

pressed rice flakes 200g, washed then soaked in water for 20 minutes

green coriander stems 50g, leaves and stalk, chopped

lemon 1, juiced

roasted peanuts or Bombay mix 100g, to garnish

Heat the oil in a wide casserole or wok, then add the mustard seeds and curry leaves, and let them crackle and pop. When the sizzle subsides after a minute or so, add the chopped onions and sauté for two to three minutes. Add the potatoes, salt, turmeric, sugar and green chillies, and cook for three to four minutes on a high heat, until the potatoes are cooked and the onions are caramelising slightly at the edges. If the potatoes need more time, stir to mix through, cover with a lid and lower the heat for a couple more minutes. Once the potatoes and onions are cooked, add the peas, if using. Next, add the washed and soaked pressed rice flakes, mix gently, taking care not to break the flakes, and cook for two to three minutes more, until heated through. Sprinkle with the chopped coriander and finish with a squeeze of lemon.

Divide on to four plates and serve sprinkled with roasted peanuts or Bombay mix – the spicy but crisp garnish adds texture.

