



# The fussy eater

## Ariel Leve

Divvying up the restaurant bill is a moment of reckoning, no matter who you're with

**I**t should come as no surprise I'm not a fan of group activities. And going out to eat with a group of people is particularly stressful. When it comes to splitting a bill, there should be a rule that everyone knows to observe. Like covering your mouth when you sneeze. If there is someone who does not drink at all and the group does, the sober person should not have to cover for those who do. If we were out at a bar, I wouldn't be expected to pay for everyone else's drinks. Why should it be any different at a restaurant?

But it is. When there is a group out for a meal, it's nothing but trouble. Someone will always get up to use the loo just as the bill arrives. Or take a phone call outside. Or they need to get home early because the babysitter has to leave. They'll throw in what they think is their share and it's never enough.

Why is it that in group situations there is an unspoken expectation that unless you chip in the same amount as everyone else, you're being petty? As the non-drinker, either I end up spending a fortune on a salad and water or I get the "you are cheap" looks when I contribute the amount that covers my portion of



the meal. I wait for the organiser to make an announcement that points out I didn't have any alcohol. Often that announcement doesn't come.

Maybe it's a defensive reaction. "People don't like having attention drawn to the fact that they've just downed a bottle and a half of wine," my friend Colin states. Colin is British, and that's an interesting argument. When did I become the rude one?

I have a friend who is so uptight about the whole issue she will pull out her iPhone and use the calculator to tally up what each person owes individually. I admire her gumption. She was quietly missing from the last dinner I went to.

Brunch is another circumstance I try to avoid. There is nothing redeeming

about brunch. Aside from the wait, and the crowds, and the noise, there's usually someone who drives the bill sky high with 10 Bloody Marys. I'll end up paying £50 for an omelette and latte. Attempting to even it out, I'll order four double espressos. But coffee never costs as much as vodka, and I end up wired for a week.

Birthdays are the most expensive. You really have to love someone to go to a birthday dinner, because their portion is added on to your share and everyone will drink. You can't speak out about it at a birthday, so all you can do is hope to sit next to someone good. The only thing worse than a birthday dinner is a birthday brunch.

You'd think going out to eat one on one with someone would be easier. It isn't. When I have dinner with my friend Louise we always go halves, no matter what. At the end we both put our credit card down and abide by the ritual of splitting it. It's a good system, even though I'm always tempted to order the tuna belly just to soak up the chance at not having to pay full price.

With another friend, Julie, it's the opposite. She will tally up who had what and present the breakdown like a PowerPoint presentation. The difference usually comes down to a few extra pounds. I now offer to pick it up just to avoid the conversation.

If I'm out with a group of women in New York, the male server will usually offer separate bills as an option, no matter how nice the restaurant is. Four women at a table? It isn't pretty. **OFM** [ariel.leve@observer.co.uk](mailto:ariel.leve@observer.co.uk)

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## KITCHEN APPS

OFM tests foodie-friendly iPhone apps. Eat, drink, download...



### The Ginger Pig

**What is it?** Free iPhone and iPad-friendly app from the deservedly acclaimed

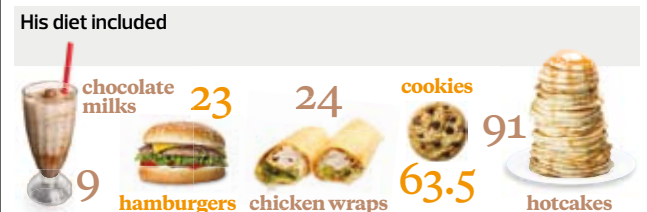
butchers and farmers of the same name. They already have a "Hog Blog" on their website, so why not bring the bacon, and other meats, to mobile phones and tablets? **Choice cuts** Disappointingly, this is not nearly as comprehensive as the Ginger Pig's always-impressive approach to offline

butchery. It might be free, but all you get to start off with is a quiz about cuts of meat and an admittedly useful and desirable guide to making the perfect crackling. You might also be plugged in to the Ginger Pig's own messageboard, but shooting the breeze about sirloin isn't going to keep you busy while that shoulder of lamb slowly roasts in the oven, is it?

**Enough to make you turn vegetarian?** You must be joking. Nevertheless, there's more fun to be had in app form elsewhere. Try the sizzling virtual bacon instead.

## THE PIE CHART

Last month, US runner Joe D'Amico ate nothing but McDonald's for 30 days while training for this year's LA marathon



... and he beat his personal best time by **30 seconds**

SOURCE: HUFFINGTON POST