



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

I've never liked to watch others eat in public since those strange Saturdays in the hair salon...

When I was growing up, my grandmother would bring me with her to the beauty salon on Saturday afternoons. At lunchtime, the assorted menus would come out and most of the ladies would order from the deli downstairs.

Minutes later, the platters would arrive. Sandwiches, bagels with cream cheese, and the three-scoop diet platter: a scoop of mayonnaise-drenched tuna fish, a scoop of mayonnaise-drenched chicken salad, and a scoop of cottage cheese piled on top of sheets of iceberg lettuce with a slice of tomato you needed a chainsaw to slice through.

Watching them eat under the hair dryer puzzled me. Was that really enjoyable? Hot air blowing over the curlers while peroxide fumes swirled. Everywhere you looked, women with aluminium foil in their hair and dressed in pink robes with towels around their neck to catch drops of dye. It occurred to me then as it does now: why?

I find it disturbing when I see people eating in public places. Obviously, I don't mean restaurants or picnics. I'm talking about places where meals are not meant to be eaten.



For instance, on the tube. How hungry are you that you can't wait to be above ground? A chocolate bar is one thing. But an actual meal? I draw the line at anything that requires cutlery and doesn't fit in your pocket or purse.

I was on a fairly crowded tube and I saw a woman in a business suit eating takeaway chicken wings. At first I thought she was just going to take a bite and save the rest. But no, she spread the napkins out over her lap and dug in. The ride was too rocky for cutting the meat so she ate with her fingers. Then she began licking them. Just watching her I felt I'd contracted a virus.

When we got held up inside the tunnel for a few minutes she continued to feast, seemingly relieved that there was no motion to interfere.

It's worse seeing people eat on the run. That's why God invented the power bar

Part of what bothers me is that observing someone eat when you're not sharing a meal with them is strangely uncomfortable. When I see someone eating on a park bench or on the steps of a museum, I feel like an interloper; inadvertently connected to this intimate experience.

But at least in these instances, we're sitting down. Even worse is watching people eat on the run. I know secondhand smoke is unhealthy but what about secondhand heartburn? It happens all the time in New York – you'll spot someone race-walking while eating a slice. That's why God invented the power bar.

It's not just where people are willing to eat but what. My friend Carrie told me she saw a man at her gym eating Chinese food. He was on the stationary bike, barely peddling, eating noodles from a container. "I know my gym is pretty low-rent," she said, "but come on – who wants to work out in a place that smells like a delicious greasy bad-for-you Chinese?"

What intrigues me is that when people are wolfing down the burrito on the bus they seem completely nonplussed by what others might think. What do they care if I think they're eating too fast? Or if they should be watching their cholesterol. At the beauty salon one woman would order the thickest, greasiest cheeseburger and chips – and you could tell it was a guilty pleasure. Maybe that's it. If you're eating a meal while in transit or getting your hair done... it doesn't count. **OFM** ariel.leve@observer.co.uk

KITCHEN APPS

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Levi Roots' Sunshine Food

What is it? Caribbean recipes from the only *Dragon's Den* contestant anyone remembers. Price: £3.99.

Key ingredient? Roots himself. He's a charming, relaxed host, but behind the videos of him singing his Reggae Reggae Sauce song and talking about the guitar that helped him "slay the dragons" is a canny operator who's in tune with his audience.

Business acumen He might play up the jolly angle with a nice clip of his "sunshine kit", namely the basic spices required for Caribbean cooking, but there are many clever touches here, especially the recipe searches. Only have 30 minutes? On a gluten-free diet? Need a smart packed lunch? There's something here for you. And from spicy butternut squash soup to classic curried lamb, they're all eminently do-able.

But what did he learn from *Dragon's Den*? To include a 25% discount on your next batch of Reggae Reggae Sauce.

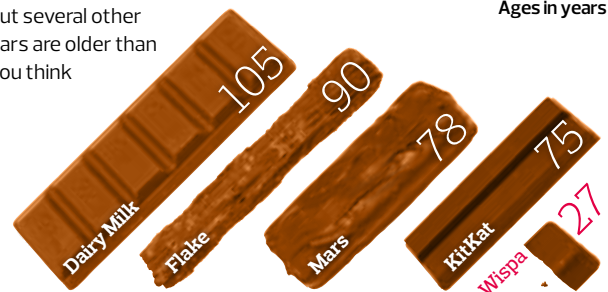
THE PIE CHART

The month in food, at a glance

Golden oldies

KitKat is 75 this year, but several other bars are older than you think

Ages in years



SOURCES: CADBURY'S, MARS, NESTLE