

Diets, dates: dangerous liaisons

By Lawrence Savell

Anyone who denies that dieting and dating are inextricably and frustratingly linked has probably never devoted a significant amount of time to either.

The only real question is the eternal (skinless) chicken vs. the (cholesterol-free substitute) egg debate.

Does one diet in order to date? Or does one date in order to meet someone and hopefully never have to diet again?

Clearly, dieting has affected dating.

Take, for example, the customary first-date dinner. In the old days, this would invariably consist of the man demonstrating his virility by ordering a slab of marbled beef providing at least a six-month supply of protein.

In these "enlightened" times, however, although his desire for such traditional and artery-congesting fare has in no way waned, he is expected to order items that reflect his awareness of modern nutritional guidance.

Thus, the prime rib has in the Biblical manner been lost to the swordfish; the Caesar salad has been deposed by the mixed greens with balsamic vinegar; the chocolate mousse bagged for the fruit sorbet.

Even traditional dating-dining practices such as the classic two-straw milkshake (now, of course, made with skim milk and low-calorie syrup) have been subverted.

Dining on dates has deteriorated to a scene with each person struggling to get his or her fair share of nourishment by creating a vacuum exceeding that of a blownout airliner window. Needless to say, the entire process lasts only a matter of seconds.

However, the resulting hyperventilation may lead to several minutes of feverish panting and moaning, normally not seen so early or publicly in a relationship.

An unfortunate consequence of being served less to eat is that there is now more time to talk, putting even greater performance anxiety on an already stressful situation.

Daters have to be on guard to avoid alienating their companions by instinctively filling the time with graphic tales of lost loves (such as bacon cheeseburgers, french fries and premium ice cream).

Cutting food into even smaller pieces is also no solution. Because each microscopic morsel needs little

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or no chewing, total chewing time is not appreciably increased.

Drinking all eight glasses of one's daily water requirement during dinner may reduce the need to talk somewhat, but this small gain is usually offset by the anticipated terror of not being able to find an aisle seat in the movie theater later that evening.

Dieting concerns have affected even the earliest stages of the dating process.

In singles bars it is now not uncommon to overhear men, emboldened by the double Virgin Mary they just downed, dispense with the time-honored astrological inquiry and instead approach an unescorted female with, "What's your cholesterol count?"

The other side of the coin is that dating concerns have affected the dieting/fitness process.

This is most evident at health clubs, now viewed chiefly as providing the opportunity to see prospective dates scantily clad and sweating from exertion without the risk of disease or (even more threatening to some) commitment.

Some establishments have even tempted to capitalize on this trend, enticing participants with amenities such as tandem exercise bicycles, "singles only" use-no-session and aerobics classes by candlelight.

Moreover, the phenomenon of pre-exercise exercising is widely gaining favor. Here, hopefuls complete a vigorous workout at home, shower and then go to their local gym, allowing them to cruise the club already pumped up without insulting the olfactory systems of dating candidates.

Despite its drawbacks, however, the link between dieting and dating may actually be an altogether natural one. Indeed, it is a combination that goes back to the earliest fix-up, when two young innocents shared an apple in a garden.

And who knows — it may end up with the two of you jogging together out of a chapel, being pelted with rice cakes thrown by relieved friends and family, then riding off to your honeymoon spa, with empty cans of non-stick cooking spray tied to the tandem bike clanging along behind.

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Lawrence Savell is a lawyer in New York City.