



Why Love Makes Us Fat

**And why it's still the sexiest
way to put on pounds**

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who connect food with emotional experiences, and those who don't. But I don't think there are too many of the second kind left, because the rest of us find them so distasteful. I honestly don't know one woman about whom I can say, unqualifiedly, "She never binges, even when she's miserable." Nor would I want to. I mean, what kind of friend would call to tell you she was unhappy, and not talk with her mouth full?

Of course, in the realm of emotional experience, love takes the cake; it's the fullest, most complex feeling most of us ever know, dragging us from the heights to the depths and back again an endless number of times. This being so, a great many of us find love fattening. In my own case, the combination of love and food has proved particularly caloric because I've always gotten the two confused — ever since my mother told me she loved me and as proof squeezed fresh orange juice for my breakfast.

But if love is the most lethal emotional experience, calorically speaking, it is surely the pleasantest way to put on pounds. It's when we're in love, after all, that we want to eat up life, to savor it like fine Madeira. All our senses are alive and so are our appetites — twice as alive, really, because we've got someone to share them with.

Food is a great accompaniment to falling in love in the first place: It's got to be



easier to get emotional over chicken Kiev than it is over, say, parchesi. And holding hands under the table isn't much fun, somehow, if there isn't any food on top of it. Also, everyone looks good in candlelight, and where are you more likely to find candlelight, in a restaurant or at an all-night driving range? Get my drift?

All of us remember those first findings-out about each other, conversational forays that always seem to take place over dinner, or brunch, or at least pina colodas (232 calories). How many of us have gotten butter on our sleeves from impulsively reaching for his hand across the table as we realize, "Hey, here's someone I could really care about"?

Caring is sharing. And one of the handiest things around to share is food. This we do in a variety of ways. First of all, we want to share our favorite restaurants. Does he like *spaghetti al pesto*? Well, isn't it fortunate that he met *you*, who happen to know the one restaurant in the city that makes perfect *pesto*. And what's this? He's shocked. You've *never* been to Schmo's? You've never had their pork fried rice with scallions? He must get you there immediately. He must watch your face (your beautiful face) as you taste this Chinese nectar of the gods.

Holding each other's sticky hands, kissing each other's garlicky mouth (and suddenly realizing how absolutely sexy garlic can be on the right mouth), you start to sense that this could be very special indeed. Or, as my friend Sylvia says about her husband, "I knew it was serious the night we discovered we both liked *vindaloo curry*."

So begin our orgies of love with their accompanying orgies of food. Ordinary people have to eat at tables; we lovers can eat together in bed, (Continued on page 315)

by **Bette-Jane Raphael**

where we want to feed all our men's appetites, and where, now that so many of us have given up smoking, the proverbial after-sex cigarette is likely to be a piece of chocolate.

I have one friend who, when she says oral sex, means eating eclairs in bed. This woman even has a list of especially wonderful bed foods that don't leave peels or crumbs or offensive-looking containers. Cool green grapes are marvelous, she says, and cones of Haagen Dazs ice cream, with sprinkles (275 calories). I always know when this woman is in love (three times in the last five years) because the first thing she does with the man is go on what she calls a "love retreat." This entails shutting herself and her lover up for the weekend in her apartment, and making sure there are decent movies on television and plenty of the right food in the refrigerator.

Most of us don't go about things so intensely at first, but it's certainly true that as our heels sail by over our heads, we want to learn everything about this perfect person, his taste in movies, in politicians and, naturally, in food. And everything we find out delights us, because of course we are itching to be delighted. What? He loves mung beans, too? Oh God, isn't that fantastic.

So you find out he loves mung beans, or Oreos, or butter brickle ice cream, and you start keeping it around the house for him, just so he should feel at home, even if you ordinarily wouldn't be caught dead with that junk under your roof. "Peanut butter cups," my friend Janet moaned. "He loved peanut butter cups. If I didn't have them in the house, he'd start walking around like a caged tiger. The trouble is, once they were in the house, guess who wound up eating most of them. One clue: It wasn't him."

I know her plight. I once went out with a man who loved those terrible little celophane-packaged cakes they sell in delicatessens. I'd buy a whole bunch of them when I knew I was going to see him, and he'd wind up eating one of them. Then I would polish off the rest—five synthetic, cream-filled, chocolate cupcakes. The problem is that most men, certainly most men I've known, don't have the driving compulsion to clean up every last crumb in the cupboard, a compulsion I share with a lot of my women friends. I guess it's the housekeeper in us.

If love turns into living together, we're in even more trouble. It's okay to eat a huge meal together when you're only seeing each other three times a week: He doesn't know you're having three sunflower seeds for dinner on the nights the two of you are apart. He just thinks it's wonderful that you enjoy your food so much—he likes a hearty eater—and that you can do it without putting on any weight. But what if he expects to see that same gusto seven nights a week?

I had a very skinny friend who drank nothing but fruit juice two days a week so she could eat what she liked the other five. Then she set up shop with a man who believes in a good breakfast plus two other hearty squares a day. And guess

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what. This unreasonable man doesn't want to eat them alone. He wants to eat them with the woman he lives with. He actually got offended when she made a lovely coq au vin, put the whole pot in front of him, and then sat down across the table with six ounces of grapefruit juice. He didn't enjoy eating, he said, in the face of her deprivation, even if it was self-imposed. Funny.

Now that I, too, live with someone, I also find it hard to keep up those personal—quirky, my lover says—diet secrets I learned when I was living alone. He does not appreciate coming home and finding the refrigerator stocked *only* with sour pickles. And since dinner is no longer a solitary affair, I, like my once-skinny friend, find it hard to regulate unilaterally or to practice the diet-induced dinner skipping I used to when I shared my apartment with only a cat. Either he and I both go on the Scarsdale Diet or we both polish off the lasagna from Saturday's party. And somehow, since we never seem to be feeling disciplined at the same time, it's always the lasagna.

I plan meals around his intake rather than mine. God forbid he shouldn't get as much to eat from me as he got from his mother. And it's true: Men can eat a lot more than we can and still get on the scale every morning and weigh the same amount they did the previous morning, before the *spaghetti Bolognese* at lunch and the cheese blintzes at dinner, the ones you made from his grandmother's recipe (320 calories, with sour cream). Meanwhile, you get on the old Detecto and want to kill yourself.

Once we're sharing an apartment with him, we want to prove what good hausfrau we are, what good potential wives. If his last girlfriend could make a terrific *chicken chasseur*, then we can make one to tempt the gods, or one god, anyway. Some of us who never tackled anything more exotic than scrambled eggs find ourselves telling anyone who stands still long enough to listen where to get the best fresh herbs, or the crispest French bread. Whenever I mention that I have to get to the fish store to pick up, say, some shad roe I've ordered for dinner, friends who knew me when I lived with the barest bones of a kitchen and cooked nothing more taxing than chili look at me with wonder. If love is supposed to be a learning experience, then I've certainly loved this past year, having learned to cook more dishes in the last twelve months than in the preceding thirty-odd years.

Being a couple also means doing a lot of social eating, much more than when I wasn't "involved." It's very rewarding to entertain friends for dinner in our apartment and to try new restaurants with other couples. A recently divorced friend illustrated just how important this kind of activity can be when she described one of her and her ex-husband's differences. She liked to make formal, sit-down dinners for their friends while he liked to have pizza sent in and consumed at floor level. She relates, "The psychologist we went to explained that we were just out of sync. She told my husband, 'Barbara is

going through her Beef Wellington years, and you're not.'"

I've circumvented this kind of food discrepancy by simply adding my boyfriend's eating habits to my own, but without giving up my own. Unfortunately, even though his eating habits are remarkably healthy and well-balanced in comparison with my own erratic cravings and guilt-edged dieting, the two together must, perforce, add up to more rather than less eating. Now I can be preparing a fine meal that contains not only the four basic food groups, but a healthy proportion of the RDA of several important vitamins—and be munching on a bag of potato chips at the same time.

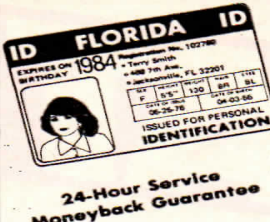
However, all this culinary togetherness we lovers share during the good times is caloric child's play compared to the dietary suicide we perform on ourselves when times are tense; when we're angry, estranged, suspicious, anxious, disappointed—all perfect emotions for the accompaniment of a good binge. "Waiting for the phone to ring," is what my friend Emily pinpoints as her optimum eating time. "If we've had a fight and aren't talking and I'm waiting for him to call, I eat. I've got to fill myself up with something; I feel so starved for him." Another woman told me she gained several pounds the week preceding her first meeting with her fiancé's parents, a thoroughly nice couple, it turned out, who liked her enormously (although the mother afterward confided to her son that she thought his intended could afford to lose a little weight).

I know that when my lover and I are enemies, food looks like my friend, which is why I'm convinced there are always five pounds sitting in the back of my closet, playing rummy—just waiting for the sounds of battle before coming out from behind my bathrobe and attaching themselves to my hips like armor. My friends can usually tell how we're getting along, him and me, by how tight the waistband is on my slacks.


A lot of women find they can keep the pounds off throughout a relationship only to give up the ghost once it ends. The end of love is often the beginning of self-pity, and if we can't have him to comfort us, well, there are always the nice folks at Pepperidge Farm who, their ads tell us, "remember." We treat ourselves like the wounded convalescents we feel we are, nourishing ourselves back to health with all the comforting, tea-and-toast food Mommy gave us when we were recuperating from the flu, and all the sweet things she popped into our mouths to ease the hurt of falling off our skates. Soon we are the pictures, the very plump pictures, of health.

I've never fallen in love with a man for whom food was not an important priority, probably because I believe that a man who doesn't care about food is morally suspect. (And what would we have to talk about, anyway?) Every man I've ever been serious about has had something to do with widening my culinary experience—not to mention my hips. I nearly married an expatriate New Yorker, now living in California. Whenever he came into town to see me, he took me to all his favorite New York restaurants; even now I'm not sure if I wasn't merely his excuse

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to get some decent *vitello tonnato*. For a long time I dated a man who did publicity for a group of restaurants, all of which seemed to be located on top of very tall buildings. We usually ate at one or another of them, and I think we might still be together if I hadn't developed vertigo.

As it turned out, the man of my dreams is also the man who taught me how to cook. Looking back, I wonder if I fell in love with him at first sight because of the smudge of baking soda at his temple. Where food is concerned, we are as well-mated as, say, Colonel Sanders and Sara Lee. We can spend an entire Saturday planning, shopping for, cooking and serving a meal to our friends. Other couples are at the museum or the movies; we're at the A&P.

I stuff the refrigerator for him the way my mother stuffed it for me; he brings home my favorite cheese; I make his sister's chicken recipe; he turns up with champagne to celebrate, he says, even if there's nothing special to celebrate—he knows I adore champagne. It's all part of giving to and nurturing one another, of sharing food the way we share knowledge and jokes and sex and all the other fine pleasures of life: unstintingly. I weigh six pounds more now than I did the day I met him, but all things considered, I'm not complaining. Anyway, I've got big bones. ■

Editor's note: Bette-Jane Raphael, a freelance writer, is currently working on a book about women's relationships with one another.

