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LIFESTYLE

The most delicious love of all



(Stephen Sedam / Los Angeles Times)

By Claire Berger

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Am I the only person in the world who has felt a passionate rush from a perfect mouthful of food? I didn't think so. Because for me, and maybe you, the line between food and sex is blurred beyond recognition.

Let's start at the beginning — my childhood, with a guilty Jewish mom and dad who parented with tasty bribery. I got a cookie (or three) after a long day at school, an extra serving of pasta for a good deed and a special dessert because, well, my mom just really liked sweets. A crazed foodie was born, bred and beyond redemption.

When I headed off to college, I found I was turned on by any guy who offered to cook for me. At the next phase of my life, married with children, I discovered that cooking was a great family play date. We threw lots of parties at our house.

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I got my kids cooking at a young age and launched yet another generation of food-obsessed crazies. It's not my proudest achievement as a parent, but it could have been worse. Together, we cooked everything but meth, so please cut me some slack here.

And now that my kids are grown and left to manage their own culinary obsessions, I find myself in a whole new relationship with food. And I mean "relationship" literally.

I am single now, so most evenings are filled with the romance of me and my dinner. Party of two? Uh, yes, if you count my meal as my date, which it usually is.

But don't pity me.

We often have something very special together. I admire my meal's healthy balance, color contrast, ethnic diversity and how it feels. Heck, I often photograph it to show off to friends later.

I vacillate about the merits of dating my food. But it's exactly what I am in the mood for and never interrupts my thought process. There's no fear of it talking my ear off or boring me with narcissistic chatter. Sure, I have to clean up after it, but I don't have to worry about romantic lighting, and we can even eat standing over the sink.

Still, a little company would be nice. So I try to date. And I look for prospective partners online.

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Indeed, I am always searching for secret clues in my prospective date's profile as to which kind of guy he is. So, I'm just going to go on the record here and confess: If you say you are a chef, I will go out with you.

If you say you can cook in your online profile *and* your photo gallery features a picture of a beautifully plated entree instead of a muscle car, I will go out with you.

If you know the "Hot 10" is not a nickname for the Laker Girls but the cover story of the September Bon Appetit magazine, I will go out with you.

I will go out with *any* man who skips the Starbucks meet & greet and jumps right into asking me out to dinner.

As a foodie, I track chefs the way sports fans study box scores. If you know Roy Choi from Ludo Lefebvre, Ari Taymor from Rick Bayless, Suzanne Goin from Susan Feniger, we'll be cuddling before dessert.

If you're charming and funny and love food, well, that's my dream date in the making. If we really hit it off and your wit and personality are as yummy as our meal, I'm going to ask you out for a second date and I am going to make you dinner. I'll invite you to pull up a stool in my kitchen, and then the evening seduction will begin.

Naturally, my therapist told me that emotional eating is not healthy — it's not a sane way to control the roller coaster that my life often feels like.

But I can't stop waxing rhapsodic about the benefits of food.

There's the anaerobic workout of planning and executing a meal that has me on my feet for hours, chopping, stirring, pouring and plating. The exhilarating endorphin flush I feel when people enjoy my cooking. The sensation that comes from eating a sweet, ripe, chocolate-covered strawberry. The intoxicating aroma of fresh, fried anything. The calming, almost pharmaceutical effect of a warm mug of spiced sweet tea with steamed milk.

So I guess for me, food is a stress reducer on a number of levels, without the risks of a hangover, an overdose, a torn ligament or urinary tract infection.

The greatest risk is fuller breasts, curvier hips and an ample rear end, which I am happy to report many men actually find attractive. (Thank you, Kim Kardashian.)

As you might imagine, I remain a hopeful romantic in all aspects of my life. I have faith I will meet the man of my dreams. We will marry and, this I know for sure, our wedding cake will be truly scrumptious.

Claire Berger is a Los Angeles-based writer who enjoys writing with her mouth full.

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