



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

Why is it so hard to arrange a lunch date? All those endless negotiations and still it's bound to go wrong

Choosing where to eat can be just as stressful as choosing what to eat. With a work-related meal, there is a clear hierarchy. Whoever is in the position of power gets to decide. If you need something from someone and they've suggested meeting for lunch, the only way they will be willing to come to your neighbourhood is if it happens to be in their neighbourhood.

I've often suggested meeting in a part of town that suits me and am consistently shot down. Since I work from home, there is a built-in expectation that I'm able to travel. People who work in an office have to get back to the office. Where do I have to get back to? My empty apartment?

There are many steps involved in meeting for a meal and you have to have stamina. First, there's deciding upon the date. This is the easiest part. Either you can meet or you can't. Once a date is decided, you move into the trickier part of the negotiation: where to meet.

An editor recently suggested we meet at a restaurant in St Pancras station because it was close to the tube that, naturally, I would have to take. I guess



that was thoughtful. But if I'm travelling in anyway, walking an extra five or 10 minutes outside the station isn't going to make a difference. Also, it feels more like an official plan if I get to see daylight.

He suggested somewhere, but it was a 20-minute walk. Five minutes is one thing. But 20 minutes? That's a cardiovascular workout. I'd have to wear gym clothes. We started over.

Then we moved to step three: what kind of food? This took up an additional 20 emails until eventually we reached step four: choosing the time. Finally, after all that, we had a plan.

Two days later, he cancelled.

When meeting a friend for a meal, there is still the dilemma of who will travel more, and with my New York friends, people keep score. I'll suggest

A 5-minute walk to the restaurant is one thing. But 20? I'd have to wear gym clothes

a Japanese restaurant near me and a sharp response will come back: "I came downtown last time. Your turn to come uptown." The resentment is so intense – you'd think I'd slept with her husband when she was nine months pregnant.

A few weeks ago, I had plans to meet my friend, Tom, for dinner. Tom will invariably suggest somewhere right near him in east London, and what makes matters worse he has a car. The last time we met I reluctantly agreed to go to east London but complained about the 45-minute tube journey.

"It's time you can use to read and think," he volunteered.

I told him I didn't mind taking the tube over but that it would be great if after dinner, he could drive me back to west London. "Are you kidding?" He snapped: "It would take me twice as long to drive as it is to take the tube."

What happened to using the time to think?

In the end, we compromised. He drove me to the tube station. Which was not really a compromise but I was too exhausted to argue.

When it's in a romantic context, the question, "What do you feel like?" fills me with such anguish that I want to cancel immediately. On one hand, I appreciate that I'm being included but I'm an indecisive person – especially when it comes to where to eat.

A friend who has been dating a lot recently told me that what she was looking for in a man was someone who could choose the restaurant. That trumped looks or kindness. **OFM** ariel.leve@observer.co.uk

KITCHEN APPS

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The Good Pub Guide 2011

What is it? The smartphone companion to the almost 30-year-old bible of the nation's hostelries. Priced at £3.99, it's compatible with Android as well as iPhones, but not iPad.

Thirsty? Then let GPS be your guide. Say you're on a long weekend drive in the country, a bit lost, but in need of lunch, somewhere to stay or a swift half at the very

least. The wonders of satellite, combined with the guide's info-rich archive of 25,000 pubs means finding the best establishment for your needs is a doddle. You can even map your route.

Clever, yes, but is it useful? Filtering results by price, child-friendliness, availability of food and the quality of the scenery as well the beer is a smart move.

Don't chuck the book out of the glovebox just yet... If you really are in the middle of nowhere, you might want to cross your fingers and hope for a half-decent Wi-Fi signal.

THE PIE CHART

Amount UK households will spend on food this Christmas.

