



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

The British are elitist about eating snacks. They seem to think that it's as American as Sarah Palin

Why does snacking have such a bad reputation? Ever since I was a child I've been warned that if I have a snack I won't be hungry for dinner. Yes I will. I'll always be hungry for dinner. Having a biscuit won't interfere with my appetite. Why? Because snacks do not ruin one's appetite. They prime it. It's like having a fun appetiser. Four hours in advance.

Part of the appeal of snacking is its illicit nature. While my classmates were hiding cigarettes or drugs in their bedroom I'd hide Doritos or a chocolate bar. Snacks were the forbidden fruit. Unless the snack was a piece of fruit. Then it was just a letdown.

One of the few joys of adulthood is that I can eat whatever I want, whenever I want. Yet there is still a bias against snacking and I'm made to feel guilty. Especially in the UK. Whenever I've mentioned to friends here that I'm in the mood for a snack they look at me like I've just said something vulgar.

"We don't really have snacks in Britain," my English friend sniffed. Really? High tea? If you're having scones at 4pm you are snacking.



Maybe it's semantics. The word "snacking" isn't widely used. An American friend who lives in Oxford with her two young children was indignant when I brought up the subject. "The British have an elitist attitude towards snacking," she declared. "They see it as American as Sarah Palin."

Apparently, the issue of snacking is a divisive topic in her international academic community. She proudly stands by giving her kids snacks because "they're hungry all the time and it shuts them up".

But other parents in her neighbourhood have a different perspective. She points out that they always begin their criticism with, "It could be a cultural thing..." which

Why do they eat biscuits shaped like teddy bears in the office? It's a job, not a nursery

everyone knows is code for: you're a terrible parent.

In America I suppose the strangest snacking phenomena are the "office snacks" – jars and bowls of miscellaneous sweets on various desks. There is also a ubiquitous giant plastic tub of mini-pretzels. I went to a television production company in New York and there was a vat filled with little cookies shaped like teddy bears. Why do people need to eat handfuls of biscuits in the office? And why do they need to be shaped like teddy bears? It's work, not nursery school.

My friend Carrie, who works in an office, told me that sometimes people will complain when they don't have snacks at meetings. "It used to be very competitive – who could serve the best snacks – someone brings cupcakes, the next person would bring chips and salsa. One time I made margaritas until the blender blew out the fuse and half the floor's power went off. Oops!"

I'm all for snacks but not in meetings. I had a meeting with a Hollywood producer once and the entire time he was chomping on pretzel sticks. I had to shout to be heard above his chewing. Then when he spoke, he sprayed pretzel crumbs. We ended up not working together.

Recently, there's been a lot written about healthy snacks – what to eat, what not to eat and how if you must snack, what's best. It's too complicated. I've devised my own way to snack without feeling any of the guilt. I've decided to cut out meals. **OFM** ariel.leve@observer.co.uk

KITCHEN APPS

OFM tests foodie-friendly iPhone apps. Eat, drink, download...



Allrecipes Dinner Spinner

What is it? A treat for those with no imagination, or who like to live randomly at meal times. Not forgetting anyone coming home starving at three in the morning and looking to rustle something up from whatever's in the cupboards, even if that means lettuce, margarine and a bag of boiled sweets. Free. **Key ingredient?** The spinner. Think devilishly addictive fruit machine-like mechanism

whose three rows consist of "dish type", "ingredients" and "ready in", ie how long is it going to take?

How does it work? Here's where the fun starts. Either select items from each category yourself, or press the magic button and let the app deliver you a random recipe. Hey presto! It looks like it's Thai chilli chicken noodles for dinner tonight.

Surely it can't make a meal out of every mix of ingredients? True – it was foxed by my request for a lamb-based dessert taking 30 minutes to create. But you can't have everything.

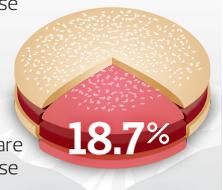
THE PIE CHART

The month in food, at a glance



Proportion of 10–11 year olds in Oldham who are classed as obese

Percentage of 10–11 year olds in the UK who are classed as obese



Size of "fat tax" proposed by Oldham council on companies seeking a licence to sell fast food

£1,000

SOURCES: MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS; NHS