

# Why Do Men Have Nipples?

**Hundreds of Questions  
You'd Only Ask a Doctor  
After Your Third Martini**



Mark Leyner and  
Billy Goldberg, M.D.



• Chapter 1 •

# You Are What You Eat



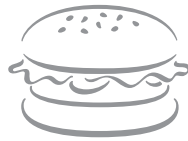
It's 10 P.M., and my partner in writing and crime, Mark Leyner, and I are late as usual, but the party is in full swing. We brought a bottle of Don Julio tequila, which Leyner sampled voraciously in the cab, insisting that it needed to be screened for industrial toxins. We enter the elegantly appointed Park Avenue home of Eloise Cameron, a philanthropist, patron of the arts, and Botox junkie. Hors d'oeuvres are being served and the slightly inebriated and flush-faced Leyner grabs a mouthful of Swedish meatballs, kisses our hostess, and then comments, "Eloise, baby, better lay off the collagen. Kissing those lips is like making out with the Michelin man." She attempts to smirk with disdain, but the Botox leaves her face impassive.

I corral Leyner and we proceed into the living room. No sooner have we entered when I'm embraced from

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behind. I turn around and it's Jeremy Burns, an investment banker who sits two rows behind me at the Knicks games. Jeremy is well known to the Madison Square junk-food vendors for his insatiable appetite for hot dogs, candy floss, and beer. He is now almost unrecognizable in his new Atkins-induced skeletonlike state. "Who exhumed you?" Leyner belches. I am overcome by embarrassment but secretly wetting myself with laughter. Jeremy tries to sidestep Leyner and as their arms brush, Leyner is covered with the grease that now oozes from Jeremy's pores. Leyner whispers to me, "This dude is all greased up like a rectal thermometer." I push Leyner away and he uses this opportunity to sneak over to the bar for another blast of Don Julio. I am left with Jeremy and his insufferable stories about life on the meat-and-fat diet, and a million medical questions about food.

If we are what we eat, why do we know so little about food and nutrition?



## You Are What You Eat

### **Does it really take seven years to digest chewing gum?**

What is it with seven years? You break a mirror, seven years of bad luck. Each dog year is seven human years. Seven years to digest swallowed gum? What if a dog broke a mirror then swallowed a pack of gum? It sounds like an algebra problem.

Chewing gum is not digestible but it definitely doesn't sit in your stomach for years. Gum actually might help things move through the bowels faster. Sorbitol is sometimes used as a sweetener in gum and this can act as a laxative. What does this mean? Yes, if you look carefully, you should see it floating next to all of those lovely yellow sweetcorn kernels.

### **Why does your pee smell when you eat asparagus?**

Asparagus contains a sulfur compound called mercaptan. It is also found in onions, garlic, rotten eggs, and in the secretions of skunks. The signature smell occurs when this substance is broken down in your digestive system. Not all people have the gene for the enzyme that breaks down mercaptan, so some of you can eat all the asparagus you want without producing a smell. One study published in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* found that only 46 percent

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of British people tested produced the odor while 100 percent of French people tested did. Insert your favorite French joke here:

.....

**3:32 p.m.**

**Gberg:** Mr. Leyner, sir????

**Leyner:** Sir, reporting for duty, sir!

**Gberg:** You ready for a little work, son?

**Leyner:** Sir, permission to discharge my weapon into the sky, sir?

**Gberg:** Just don't hit the keyboard.

**Leyner:** What should we do today?

**3:35 p.m.**

**Leyner:** I have an idea . . .

**Gberg:** We have several things to do. Finish the preface, which we need to do together. Then we have 2 more intros.

**Gberg:** Or else we can add some funniness to some questions.

**Gberg:** You had an idea?

**Leyner:** Let's do that stuff (i.e., the preface and last two intros) . . . the real "writing" on Tuesday at your place . . . I think it works better with pacing.

**Gberg:** So let's work our way through the book. Let's start on the food chapter.

**Gberg:** We need to add something to this mother.

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**Leyner:** Like?

**Gberg:** Some asides.

**Leyner:** I'm getting a Propel.

**Gberg:** OK, so we need to add some expert medical commentary. By the way, do you think if we keep mentioning Propel, that delicious vitamin-enhanced beverage from the makers of Gatorade, we can get some free stuff?

**Gberg:** Only 20 calories per bottle. Sweet fitness water!!! Where are you?

**Leyner:** OK, Pops. I'm here, eating my sandwich, drinking Propel . . . yes, absolutely!!!! We should shamelessly and unethically claim that Propel cures impotence, Crohn's disease . . .

**Gberg:** . . . and the smell of your urine from asparagus . . .

**Leyner:** . . . halitosis, and rectal whatever the hell you have.

**Gberg:** Should we add some French jokes?

**Leyner:** Certainly—let's claim that Propel deodorizes your urine EVEN after eating asparagus . . . then we'll get cases of the stuff!

**Gberg:** And you have to be a little less vulgar otherwise my wife won't be able to give this book to anyone as a gift without offending them.

**Gberg:** Bunch of puritans!



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### **Does sugar really make kids hyperactive?**

Parents are always looking for an excuse to explain their children's bad behavior, and sugar has taken a lot of blame. This may come as no surprise, but the Coca-Cola Company doesn't want to take responsibility, and makes it very clear that studies have failed to find any substantial evidence proving a relationship between sugar consumption and hyperactivity. Well, the company is correct. Sugar does feed the body as an energy source, but it doesn't make kids hyperactive.

It is more likely that kids tend to eat sugary foods at times when they would be excited and rambunctious anyway (parties, holidays, movies, weddings, funerals). This can only be good news for the producers of such fine healthy treats as Kellogg's Chocolate Frosties, candy floss, Kinder Surprise and Frosted Pop-Tarts.

### **What causes an ice-cream headache?**

Aaaah, the joy of a Popsicle on a hot summer day.

One theory places the source for the brain freeze in the sinuses, where the pain may be caused by the rapid cooling of air in the frontal sinuses. This triggers local pain receptors.

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Another theory postulates that the constriction of blood vessels in the roof and rear of the mouth causes pain receptors to overload and refer the pain to your head. There is a nerve center there, in the back of your mouth, called the sphenopalatine ganglion, and this is the most likely source of the dreaded ice-cream headache.

A friend of ours suggested a quick cure of rapidly rubbing your tongue on the roof of your mouth to warm it up. Her demonstration included a bizarre clucking sound. Leyner tried this and found himself followed by a large goose of whom he seems to have become inordinately fond.

## Does eating chocolate cause acne?

For those of you who use chocolate as a substitute for sex, you can breathe a sigh of relief. There is no evidence that acne is caused by chocolate. Acne is connected more to changing hormones than to food choices.

Links have also been made between stress and acne. Recently, a group of dermatologists set out to prove that this common belief was also a myth but they found the reverse. Their study of twenty-two college students found that emotional stress was directly linked to acne severity.

But back to the chocolate issue, the University of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Naval Academy both

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demonstrated that chocolate does not cause acne. At the University of Pennsylvania, researchers fed subjects “chocolate” bars with no chocolate, while another group ate chocolate bars with nearly ten times as much chocolate as in a typical bar. Results of the experiment showed no significant difference in acne in either group. Other forbidden greasy foods like French fries, fried chicken, nachos, potato chips, and pork scratchings probably don’t cause the dreaded zits either. So lighten up, kick back, and relax, and if that doesn’t work go to McDonald’s for a supersize fries and a chocolate shake.

## Why do you cry when you cut onions?

Cutting an onion releases an enzyme called lachrymatory-factor synthase. This starts the process that leads to tears. This enzyme then reacts with amino acids in the onion and the amino acids are converted to sulfenic acids. The sulfenic acids spontaneously rearrange to form syn-propanethial-S-oxide, which is released into the air. When this chemical reaches the eyes, it triggers the tears by contacting nerve fibers on the cornea that activate the tear glands. Now you are crying.

Scientists have tried to make a “non-crying” onion but it seems that the crying enzymes are also responsible for the zesty onion flavor. But there may be

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some hope on the way. The group of Japanese plant biochemists that only recently discovered lachrymatory-factor synthase, the crying enzyme, believe that “it might be possible to develop a non-lachrymatory onion by suppressing the lachrymatory-factor-synthase gene while increasing the yield of thiosulphinate.” Sounds delicious!

In the meantime there are several solutions to try to avoid the problem of onion-induced tears. Heating onions before chopping, cutting under a steady stream of water, or wearing goggles.

The most reliable: ordering takeout.

## Do cucumbers relieve puffy eyes?

A well-placed cucumber may feel wonderful, but there is no special ingredient in it that reduces swelling under the eyes. Cucumbers are 90 percent water, and it is the cooling effect of the water that constricts the blood vessels around the eyes, therefore decreasing the swelling. The colder the cuke the better.

Some other swollen-eye solutions include black tea bags in cold water, the tannic acid content being the key to reducing swelling. Hemorrhoid cream also helps, but I’d prefer puffy eyes.

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### **Why are you served juice and cookies after you donate blood?**

There is no solid medical reason for juice and cookies after blood donation. The idea is that this little snack will help to replenish your fluids and raise your blood sugar. But donating blood shouldn't really affect your blood sugar, and the small amount of juice that you drink probably has no significant effect on your fluid status. The best use of this snack is to allow you to rest and adjust before you go on your way after doing your civic duty.

Perhaps other food combinations could attract more blood donors:

1. For the upper-crust crowd: champagne and foie gras.
2. For the hipster: a smoothie with wheatgrass and a PowerBar.
3. For the Atkins crowd: diet soda and a steak.
4. For the hip-hop gangster: a bottle of beer and some fried wings.

### **Why do women crave chocolate during their period?**

There is little scientific support for a link between food cravings and the menstrual cycle. There have been suggestions that chocolate cravings during

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menstruation are related to a deficiency of magnesium or are linked to carbohydrate consumption to self-medicate depression, but no strong evidence has been found to prove either one. Studies have placed volunteers on liquid diets that provided plenty of calories and all the essential vitamins and minerals needed, and participants still craved certain foods. This suggests that nutritional deficits are not necessary for cravings of any kind and that these desires are more psychologically based.

Medical texts, however, are filled with fascinating stories about bizarre “food” cravings.

Pica is the medical term for a pattern of eating non-nutritive substances (such as dirt, clay, paint chips, etc.) that last for at least one month in the body. The name comes from the Latin word for magpie, a bird known for its large and indiscriminate appetite. Iron deficiency can cause pica and can also cause a craving for ice, referred to as pagophagia. “Tomatophagia” has also been reported in a sixty-six-year-old woman with iron deficiency who consumed several whole tomatoes daily over a two-month period. Her tomato cravings disappeared when her anemia was treated.

## Why do you get bloated when you eat salty food?

This is a common question that is most often asked by women who feel bloated because of PMS and

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believe that it is related to the amount of salt they eat. We both have learned over the years that you should never upset a woman if she is having premenstrual symptoms, so we went back to the medical school textbooks on this one to get the answer right.

Water accounts for 45 to 50 percent of the body weight in adult females and 55 to 60 percent of the body weight in adult males. Approximately 50 percent of this water is in muscle, 20 percent in the skin, 10 percent in the blood, and the remaining 20 percent in the other organs. Despite wide variations in dietary intake, the volume and composition of the body's fluids are maintained in an extremely narrow range as we lose (by urinating, sweating, etc.) as much water as we take in. In other words, the amount of a substance added to the body each day is equal to the amount eliminated or used by the body. This is called the balance state or the steady state.

Translation: if your kidneys are functioning normally, the amount of salt you eat shouldn't make you feel bloated. Maybe your trousers are just too tight because you ate all that chocolate as a substitute for sex.

## What is a food coma?

We are sitting at i Trulli, a top New York City Italian restaurant, and I have already unbuttoned my trousers as I try to gather strength for dessert. I

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glance to my left and my sister-in-law has eaten herself to sleep. Her head is slumped on my wife's shoulder and drool is about to begin trickling from her mouth. After taking several pictures to add this event to family lore, I was again asked about the cause of the dreaded food coma.

There are many possibilities as to what causes the classic "food coma." Many people report drowsiness after eating the traditional Christmas or Thanksgiving meal. Turkey is blamed for this soporific effect, specifically the amount of L-tryptophan contained in turkey. L-tryptophan is an essential amino acid and is a precursor of serotonin. Both serotonin and L-tryptophan have a calming, sedative effect in the human body.

L-tryptophan is naturally found in turkey protein but is actually present in many plants and animals, including chicken and cows. The average serving of turkey (about 100 grams or 3.5 ounces) contains a similar amount of L-tryptophan as found in an average serving of chicken and ground beef.

Two other factors that contribute to the desire to sleep at the dinner table are meal composition and increased blood flow to the gastrointestinal tract. Studies have shown that a solid-food meal resulted in faster fatigue onset than a liquid diet. The solid-food meal also causes a variety of substances to jump into action that ultimately leads to increased blood flow to the abdomen. This increase in blood flow and an increase in the metabolic rate for digestion can contribute to the "coma."

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Now, I can tell the end of the family story. A good double espresso can sometimes be enough of a pick-me-up to get through dessert. But, in an attempt to resuscitate her comatose sister, my wife took her to the bathroom to splash water on her face and press her belly against the cold bathroom tiles. Unfortunately, time is the only true cure for the food coma.

## Why are you hungry an hour after eating Chinese food?

We fear that getting into any diet debate will cause us to be besieged by a gaggle of Atkins followers in a bacon-induced frenzy. But we may be safe this time, because the culprit may be carbohydrates—specifically, rice and pasta.

Chinese meals, for the most part, contain rice, little meat, and plenty of low-calorie vegetables. The rice and noodle dishes like fried rice and lo mein contain carbohydrates that cause the blood sugar to peak and then plummet, causing hunger. So, if you are going out for Chinese, don't forget the Peking duck, General Tso's chicken, or the spareribs. You may feel greasy and start quoting Mao, but you won't feel hungry later.

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### **What is Monosodium Glutamate, and does it cause headaches?**

Monosodium glutamate is the sodium salt of the amino acid glutamic acid. Mmmm, doesn't that sound appetizing?

Glutamate is a naturally occurring amino acid that is found in nearly all foods, especially those high in protein. Monosodium glutamate is used as a flavor enhancer in a variety of foods prepared at home, in restaurants, and by manufacturers of processed food. It is not fully understood how it adds flavor to other foods, but many scientists believe that it stimulates glutamate receptors in the tongue to augment flavors.

Monosodium glutamate has been the target of bad press based largely on reported reactions to Chinese food, the dreaded "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome."

For those who believe that they may react badly to monosodium glutamate, the following symptoms have been reported:

**burning sensation in the back of the neck, forearms,  
and chest**

**numbness in the back of the neck, radiating to the  
arms and back**

**tingling, warmth, and weakness in the face, temples,  
upper back, neck, and arms**

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**facial pressure or tightness**

**chest pain**

**headache**

**nausea**

**rapid heartbeat**

**bronchospasm (difficulty breathing) in monosodium  
glutamate-intolerant people with asthma**

**drowsiness**

**weakness**

In 1958 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) designated monosodium glutamate as a Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS) substance, along with many other common food ingredients, such as salt, vinegar, and baking powder, but consumers continue to have questions regarding its safety and efficacy. However, there is general agreement in the scientific community, based on numerous biochemical, toxicological, and medical studies over the last twenty years, that monosodium glutamate is safe for the general population.

## Can carrots help improve your vision?

The Roman emperor Caligula believed that carrots had the properties of an aphrodisiac, making men more potent and women more submissive. He is said to have fed the entire Roman Senate a banquet of

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only carrots so that he could watch the senators fornicate like wild beasts. This has nothing to do with eyesight, but it is quite a tale.

The carrot myth dates back to World War II when the British Royal Air Force was attempting to hide the fact that it had developed a sophisticated airborne radar system to shoot down German bombers. They bragged that the great accuracy of British fighter pilots at night was a result of them being fed enormous quantities of carrots. It is true that carrots are rich in beta-carotene, which is essential for sight. The body converts beta-carotene to vitamin A, and extreme vitamin A deficiency can cause blindness. However, only a small amount of beta-carotene is necessary for good vision. If you're not deficient in vitamin A, your vision won't improve no matter how many carrots you eat.

In fact, the ingestion of excess vitamin A can cause toxicity, which can include symptoms such as yellow-orange coloring of the skin, hair loss, weight loss, fatigue, and headache.

## Does coffee stunt your growth?

I, Billy Goldberg, would like to dedicate this answer to my dear friend caffeine. He has been with me through good times and bad. Without him I would not have survived the long nights of my hospital residency nor the deadline of this book. To my friend I

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proclaim, "I do not hold you responsible that I am only five foot nine!"

Actually there has been considerable research on whether caffeine consumption is linked to osteoporosis. Overall, it can be concluded that moderate caffeine consumption is not an important risk factor for osteoporosis, particularly where women consume a healthy balanced diet. Some research suggests that regular caffeine consumption may lead to loss of calcium in the urine, but this does not have a measurable effect on bone density either. So as long as you have a balanced diet with adequate calcium intake, you can enjoy your espresso with no cause for concern.

So, why did our parents scare us with this myth when we wanted coffee as children? Probably for the same reason that they invoked the fear of losing an eye whenever we ran with scissors or snapped a towel. Pure parental mind control. It also helps if the child falls asleep and leaves Mommy and Daddy alone to find out if there really is a G-spot (see chapter 3, page 65).

## Why does skipping your morning coffee cause a headache?

We truly are a nation of drug addicts. With alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine, we are constantly medicating

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ourselves to get through our daily activities. Now that people are commonly found freebasing caffeine in the form of Red Bull, we need an answer to this pressing question: Does cutting out the morning cup of coffee cause a 4 P.M. headache from hell?

It is clear that caffeine can have an effect on headaches. Caffeine is present in both over-the-counter medications (such as Syndol) and prescription medications. Caffeine acts to constrict blood vessels and therefore helps some headaches. But, the withdrawal symptoms you experience when cutting out your daily coffee are not as clear-cut as you may think.

A 1999 study in *The Journal of Pharmacology* challenged the assumption that stopping coffee causes headaches. When participants in this study were unaware of the caffeine-withdrawal focus, the frequency and severity of their symptoms were much lower and sometimes nonexistent. A recently released analysis concluded that there is a withdrawal syndrome when stopping coffee. Symptoms are thought to be worse if you consume more caffeine and then abruptly stop, although not everyone suffers the same withdrawal symptoms. Other symptoms include fatigue, drowsiness, irritability, depression, or trouble concentrating.

If you want to wean yourself off gradually, you can follow Mark Leyner's schedule:

**Monday—double espresso**

**Tuesday—latte**

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**Wednesday—single espresso**

**Thursday—Snapple iced tea**

**Friday—soy half-decaf mocha cappuccino**

**Saturday—a can of Coke**

**Sunday—beer (no caffeine and a wonderful breakfast treat)**

## Why does spicy food make your nose run?

There is nothing quite like that rush you get when you mistake the wasabi for pistachio ice cream. But alas, this doesn't lead to nose running. That is because wasabi does not contain capsaicin, the extremely irritating chemical found in jalapeño or habanero peppers. Capsaicin is believed to stimulate central nervous system fibers that control the quantity and thickness of mucus and other fluids secreted in the nasal passages and stomach.

For you trivia nerds, heat in peppers is measured on something called the Scoville Scale:

**0–100 Scoville units includes most sweet pepper varieties.**

**100–500 Scoville units includes pepperoncinis.**

**500–1,000 Scoville units includes New Mexico peppers.**

**1,000–1,500 Scoville units includes Espanola peppers.**

**1,000–2,000 Scoville units includes ancho and pasilla**

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**peppers.**

**1,000–2,500 Scoville units includes Cascabel and cherry peppers.**

**2,500–5,000 Scoville units includes jalapeño and Mirasol peppers.**

**5,000–15,000 Scoville units includes serrano peppers.**

**15,000–30,000 Scoville units includes the Chile de Arbol peppers.**

**30,000–50,000 Scoville units includes cayenne and Tabasco peppers.**

**50,000–100,000 Scoville units includes chiltepin peppers.**

**100,000–350,000 Scoville units includes Scotch Bonnet and Thai peppers.**

**200,000 to 300,000 Scoville units includes habanero peppers.**

**Around 16,000,000 Scoville units is pure capsaicin.**

The single hottest known pepper is the Red Savina habanero. If you think the jalapeño makes your nose run, the Red Savina will leave you wading knee-deep in a puddle of your own nasal secretions.

## Does spicy food cause ulcers?

No, spicy foods do not cause ulcers. Stomach ulcers can be aggravated by a nice dash of Tabasco sauce. Drinking alcohol, smoking, or experiencing stress can also make ulcers worse.

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Most stomach ulcers are caused either by infection from a bacterium called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) or by overuse of anti-inflammatory pain medications such as aspirin or ibuprofen. The ulcers caused by bacteria can be treated with antibiotics and the others treated by an end to the pill popping.

## Does artificial sweetener cause headaches?

Many artificial sweeteners and food additives, including NutraSweet and Canderel, contain aspartame. Approved by the FDA in 1981, this sweetener is hotly debated as the cause of everything from headaches to seizures. The debate rages on via the Internet and in the medical literature. The FDA and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) both claim that this product is safe, but there are also many reports that show that headaches may be present as an adverse reaction in some patients.

There is no solid answer to the question of artificial sweetener causing headaches, but here are several things that are guaranteed to cause them:

1. Trying to help your child with math homework.
2. Telemarketers who call early on Sunday morning.
3. The U.S. electoral system.
4. Being stuck in traffic when the only clear radio station is playing a Céline Dion marathon.

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### Does licorice cause high blood pressure?

To begin with, it is important to understand that the delicious artificial strawberry or cherry product that we happily eat in movie theaters is not true licorice. True licorice is black and contains glycyrrhizic acid.

Medical literature contains a great deal of information about the link between licorice and high blood pressure, and if you happened to be reading the English-language abstract of an article from the Norwegian journal *Tidsskrift for Den Norske Laegeforening* in 2002, you might have found out that “the active component of licorice is glycyrrhizic acid, which inhibits the enzyme 11-beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase. This enzyme promotes the conversion of cortisol to cortisone and is thereby responsible for the specificity of the mineralocorticoid receptor to aldosterone in the collecting tubules. Inhibition of the enzyme allows cortisol to act as the major endogenous mineralocorticoid producing a marked elevation in mineralocorticoid activity, resulting in hypertension, hypokalemia, and metabolic alkalosis.” I can’t understand why candy companies don’t use this as a slogan. Imagine the catchy jingles, funny commercials, and booming sales of black jelly beans.