



Our ineptitude with food is an easy meal ticket

By John Robson
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Did you see that scoop in the Postmedia papers this week about an Alberta woman who got workers' compensation from a court because serving ice cream made her arm hurt? How did we get to the point where difficulty handling small quantities of frozen dairy products creates a legal entitlement to public money?

It must be all this progress we've been having.

I don't know about you. But I'm pretty sure I'm descended from people whose problems with food were (a) there wasn't much of it (b) most of what there was had gone a strange colour and started to smell three months earlier and (c) the stuff that wasn't rancid tended to fight back. Try announcing to a peasant harvesting grain by hand that if repetitive motions make your arm hurt you should go ask the king for coins. Or that a hunter should get cash because of those bowstring-induced blisters on his hand, or that a fisherman's sore back from pulling in nets carried a common law remedy.

I'd ask where's your beef over the fact that physical work can create soreness except I'd probably be told it never arrived because the guy carrying it tipped over and fell right into a lawyer's office. So I'll put aside this heartless approach and instead pursue what smells rather like a gravy train. Which now that I come to think of it also sounds like a dangerous thing indeed: If it derailed on a soft shoulder there'd be a tidal wave of hot, salty sludge liable to create hypertension and lawsuits.

At one time, as noted, the principal health hazard from food was eating too little of it. Later, after some progress, it became eating too much of it. But that was before a keenly honed capacity for inhaling the stuff (not literally -- see the Oreo story below) would get you judicially mandated extra airplane seats. Now you get money for not coping.

Seriously, folks. These days if we can cultivate sufficient ineptitude with food almost anything might be a meal ticket. The ice cream of doom is just the beginning. Before us lies a veritable cornucopia of mandated benefits. Consider cherry tomatoes. Those

suckers explode. (Thus one of my rules for success in business is never eat a cherry tomato in a suit. True, you rarely encounter a cherry tomato in a suit. Except, if this nonsense keeps up, a lawsuit.) Meanwhile bananas have been infamous since vaudeville days but I still think you could get laughed into court if you slip on one.

Or take the humble celery stick ... please. Once upon a time the worst that could happen was being forced to eat one to lose weight, only to end up with a mouth full of what appeared to be polymer-reinforced string soaked in weak cucumber juice. Now, surely, you could get a lucrative repetitive strain injury from all the chewing. And what about things that are hard to slice like, say, meat, or vegetables, or bread? Then there's waiters carrying trays, sommeliers experiencing

stress-related disorders from being polite to guys faking knowledge of wine to impress their dates, short-order cooks feeling the heat ... is there one single food that's safe to serve or eat?

I don't think so. Some are too hot, others too cold, some too sticky and others too dry. For instance my wife has expressly authorized me to mention her recent harrowing experience with an Oreo: reading one of those exchanges now posted online about the bizarre corrections to text messages by a small white cellphone (produced by a company I won't name because it's a food) caused her to inhale sharply at an inexpedient point in the cookie consumption phase with consequences only an eye ear nose and throat specialist could love. I would say these bloopers are worth looking up, while warning that the ones that most often get posted are bleepers not suitable for children, except you might laugh so hard it hurt and I wouldn't want your lawyers to know I'd suggested anything of that sort.

I would also certainly not want to be overheard today suggesting that if serving ice cream makes your arm hurt you should put some ice on it. Frozen water poses far too many dangers, from hypothermia to hurt factor due to slippage to melting and inundating coastal cities. Suggesting you try switching hands would presumably be discrimination against the antiambidextrous, while suggesting you switch jobs would be shocking discrimination against the monoculturally gainful. Besides, what job doesn't make things hurt?

Indeed, I find myself sore from all the typing required to compose this column, especially because I was also eating a late dinner and had to make this odd stretching motion past the keyboard that aggravated an old injury, a broken stiff upper lip. I'd be well on my way to riches except I feel thirsty and what are the chances, in these enlightened times, of my getting and drinking a glass of water without doing myself in?

John Robson's column appears weekly.

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