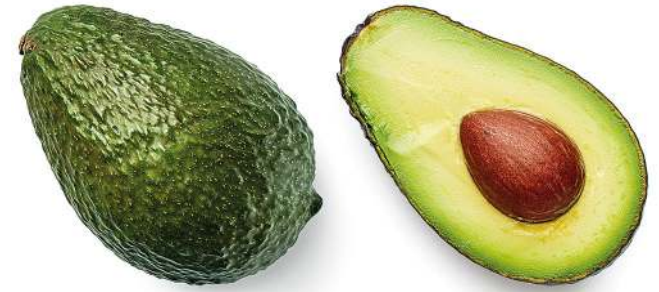




# FOOD *A fallacy of glee*



“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own*

Though published almost a century ago, *A Room of One's Own* was correct. Through food and dining, humanity has found joy and love for millennia, but whether this joy is founded through taste, company or memory is uncertain. Could it be that food simply releases chemicals in our brains, making us more energetic and pleasing us? Or perhaps the food is obsolete, and the friends we dine with are what provoke joy and laughter? Maybe the memory of a day out, enjoying a picnic by a stream, creates a joyous longing for another relaxing day? Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that food can be joyous.

What is joy? Science tells us that joy is a chemical creation of

serotonin, a neurotransmitter that produces happy emotions. A key component of serotonin is niacin, which is produced using a component of proteins. When we eat, this component (tryptophan) floods the brain, allowing the synthesis of niacin and therefore serotonin. So, scientifically speaking, joy is only a chemical, meaning it is impossible to find it without eating – but is that always true? Yes, if we were alone in a dark room with no reason to feel happy, eating should improve our mood, but can this joy be found in other ways?

Many people find happiness through creation and friendship. Creativity and food have often been paired throughout history, trying to make a sparse meal into a banquet. This experimentation has led to many

of the foods we love, and the fun of experimentation is still present today, used to express emotions or simply to relax. One of the delights associated with summer and food is picking berries and fruits in the sunshine, and then using these creatively in crumbles and pies, which can be enjoyed with friends and family. This summer activity has been omnipresent throughout history. Between the 1870s and the 1950s Londoners who could not afford a holiday abroad travelled to Kent to pick hops in the fields. This opportunity to make food (or beer) stimulated joy, holiday and happiness in poorer Londoners, once again proving a connection between creation, company and delight. Gathering hazelnuts on Holy Cross Day (14 September) was also a holiday in England, before the First World War. Through the gathering



of this food, children found fun and respite, without having to consume the food, disregarding the scientific knowledge that joy can only come from food consumption. As a result, food has often been enjoyed more as a symbol of relaxation than for the virtue of taste. Having relaxed on these holidays, the memory provides more happiness and excitement in anticipation of another day, cementing in one's mind how joyous food is.

When food is readily available, however, gathering is less important. Eating healthily is a praisable habit, and knowing you eat healthily stimulates joy and pride through feeling morally satisfied. For some people, breaking the habit, eating “bad” food, can be another kind of fun. Breaking the rules is a treat well-established within human nature and this break from another chore (in this case healthy eating) can be a joyous relief. Eating healthily is often set up by parents and by eating unhealthily there can be a strange sense of rebellion, providing joy to some. For other people, however, healthy eating can become a job and a burden, and where healthy eating once

brought joy, the absence of unhealthy eating now brings it. This negates the natural joy in food as, in this case, the lack of food leads to happiness. Lacking food, can therefore lead to a lack of social purpose.

Food, it can be established, is a means to achieve other purposes leading to joy. Eid ul-Fitr is a festival at the end of Ramadan on which Muslims enjoy a delicious feast. On this day, Muslims come together as a family and thank Allah, thus creating much joy. Easter, also, is a time when families feast, relax and enjoy, through the means of food. So, in this case, food does not provide joy itself, merely provides a pathway for joy, as well as providing a purpose for families to relax. Without food, there wouldn't be as strong a means to gather and there would be less point in celebrating.

Food is incredible. On its own, it is neither good nor evil but the experiences one has had around food shape that perception. An argumentative meal might give the food a bitter taste, whereas a relaxing meal might enhance the taste.

Through food we find a purpose to gather, relax and talk, but where does the true joy of eating come from? A love of social interaction, or a love of flavour itself? Are they mutually exclusive, or are they naturally intertwined within each other?

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