

## Feeding Storytellers By Leanne Johnson © 2006

Provided by Storyteller.net. Do not redistribute or copy without permission.

You have invited a storyteller to perform at your event. Now, what do you plan to feed them?

Like anybody else, storytellers have their own food likes and dislikes. However, more than just a preference, the food served can actually help or hinder the performance. When to eat, what to eat, what to drink, and what dietary restrictions need to be accommodated are all-important aspects to consider when planning a storytelling event.

In September 2004, I posted an inquiry to the 500+ members of the Storytell Listserve, an international Internet discussion group. I asked what foods they liked to have available at storytelling events and the reasons why. I also wanted to know what foods they did not like to have, and the reasons why not. In addition, I requested specific information from those who live with dietary restrictions. Their answers, along with my additional research, are compiled below.

### WHEN TO EAT?

*"I seldom eat before performing – at least within an hour or so. I find I perform best if I'm not full."* Judith Wynhausen.

The overwhelming majority of performers who replied to my inquiry stated they did not want to eat a full meal just before a performance.

*"Eat just enough before to chase away 'the hungries'"* wrote Bob Shimer. Many indicated a preference for a light snack before a performance. Some asked for fruit, with grapes being the runaway favorite. Others preferred a protein-rich treat, such as peanut butter on celery, or cheese with crackers.

Almost all the respondents expressed a wish for flexibility in dining arrangements.

*"A feeding trough available any time is good. Those of us that are in the habit of running late can therefore rush in after driving hundreds of miles and stuff our faces, while those who hate to eat before a performance can come off stage and do the same."* John Row.

Another concern that was voiced was the quality of time spent eating.

*"I love it when an organizer arranges a quiet time and place for me to eat. It's so hard to answer questions, be polite and social, and still consume enough nutrition to get me through the next set."* Anonymous.

## WHAT TO EAT?

*"Granola, grapes, apples, celery, salads – sounds boring I know BUT we perform better, feel better and act better when we eat light."* David Joe Miller.

Based on the responses, storytellers are a healthy bunch, at least when it comes to their stated preferred eating habits at performance venues. Grapes, berries, and oranges were highly recommended.

*"Apples are good for helping keep the mouth and throat hydrated, especially if they are already cut up."* Lainie Levin.

*"Fresh fruit reigns! Melons! Grapes, Bing cherries! Ripe peaches! Pineapple (but not too much, because I don't want to take the stage with red, raw lips..."* Sharon Kirk Clifton.

The three S's were well represented: Salads, steamed vegetables, and soups. There were some concerns expressed that soups and salads can be problematic, hard to handle, and take too long to eat. Cucumbers, a popular salad ingredient, were revealed as troublesome. *"Cucumbers, as much as I like them, cause me to burp!"* Barbara Kellogg. *"Cucumbers are great mucus makers..."* Anonymous. In addition, many requested that salad dressings and sauces be on the side, rather than on the meal.

Traditional main courses have issues, too. *"I have discovered that the "festival" foods of fried chicken, hot dogs, sausage with onions and green peppers and such no longer agree with me."* Mary Lee Sweet.

Most performers try to make the best of it, no matter what they are served. However, everyone has his or her preferences.

*"If I am to eat meat, I prefer a small, tender steak...Nothing floating in gravy. Or dark meat chicken – not breast, because it is dryer and more likely to cause choking...ergo, coughing."* Sharon Kirk Clifton.

*"I would prefer simple fruit, wheat toast, and plain chicken breast to a fancy meal."* Wendy Gourley.

Foods to avoid included beans (*please, no more Mexican Fiestas before a concert!* Anonymous), heavy sauces, starches, caffeine, carbonated drinks, and heavily battered or fried foods. Many performers avoid all dairy products when

they are working. *"I've been told that dairy products are not good for the voice right before a performance."* Mary Garrett.

Some performers love bread, and some will not touch it. *"Many don't eat white bread –you know the old saying "the whiter the bread the quicker you're dead."* Mel Edwards.

A happy compromise is a venue that offers a simple buffet layout of ingredients for performers to combine into meals that fit their time and diet restraints.

*"Make-your-own sandwiches and salad bars are great!"* Anonymous.

*"Give me a plain soup of broth and veggies, and I'm a happy camper!"* Anonymous.

*"There are few pre-made foods I can eat without knowing the contents. I encourage anyone who serves a buffet to have a small card with the contents listed by any prepared dish."* Anonymous.

*"Myself, I like a selection of sandwich making materials. The bread stops stuff dripping on the costume when eating in a hurry!"* John Row.

## **WHAT TO DRINK?**

Water, water, water. Room temperature, no ice. That is what almost everybody wants during a performance. Bottled water, and plenty of it.

*"Bottled water any place outside of your home is a good idea. Even though it might not be unsafe, your body may not tolerate it well. My husband used to travel a lot on business and claimed that when he stopped drinking the local water in the various U.S. cities he was healthier."* Lois Sprengnether Keel.

*"I just found out that the county in which I live is one of two in Indiana that are allowed to dump raw sewage into the river that runs through it. Further, the water that comes from the tap is and has been unsafe to drink for years."* Sharon Kirk Clifton.

Outside of the actual performance time, there were some other suggestions.

*"If it is right before a performance, then water with a little lemon or green tea is good."* Marcia Gutierrez.

*"Milk!...Contrary to the old wives tale, milk does not have any impact on your ability to speak."* Anonymous.

*"I drink diet Coke. At 90% of the gatherings we attend of any kind, there is NO diet drink, unless it is decaffeinated! I don't drink coffee, so I need my caffeine. I know you aren't supposed to do caffeine, but with bronchial asthma, the caffeine is actually good for me. It opens the airways. Ice tea, unsweetened, is good, too."* Mary Lee Sweet.

*"No alcohol – many won't use any of this, while others bathe in it. Just don't have a mandatory toast with it, or at least have an alternative for those who don't drink."* Mel Edwards.

## **WHAT DIETARY RESTRICTIONS?**

*"Asking about diet restrictions in advance and making sure the storyteller is shown where his/her special diet is located is a big help."* David Joe Miller.

It is certainly no secret that there are many performers who live with dietary restrictions. These are restrictions that affect the health of the performer, and must be respected. These restrictions come in a bewildering array of food intolerances, sensitivities, and allergies. Following is a brief description of some of the most prevalent within the Storytelling community at this time.

### **Intolerance definition**

Intolerance refers to the absence of specific chemicals or enzymes needed to digest a food substance. Intolerance is not a disease or an allergy as it does not trigger an immune response involving antibodies.

### **Sensitivity definition**

Food and environmental sensitivities refer to an adverse reaction when the body is exposed to a sensitizing factor in the environment or in food. It does not involve antibodies, but may involve other aspects of the immune system. Most food and chemical reactions are considered sensitivities.

### **Allergy definition**

Allergy refers to the immune system's hypersensitivity to an offending substance involving elevation of specific antibodies due to antigen stimulus. It is an immune system reaction to a substance that other people find harmless. Allergic reactions are classified into two categories, immediate and delayed, up to 72 hours. They can range from mild to severe which can cause anaphylactic shock.

### **Allergens:**

Some common food allergens include:

Corn	Chocolate
Eggs	Peanuts
Milk (hence all dairy products)	Tomatoes
Wheat & Rye	Shellfish

Latex – sufferers must avoid food handled with latex gloves, as well as kiwi fruit, potatoes, bananas, avocados, and chestnuts. Oh, and no balloons, please!

## **Vegetarian**

A vegetarian is someone living on a diet of grains, pulses (edible seeds of various pod-bearing plants such as peas or beans or lentils etc.), nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits with or without the use of dairy products and eggs.

A vegetarian does not eat any meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish or crustaceans, or slaughter-by-products such as gelatin or animal fats.

*"I am a vegetarian, but not a huge eater. I love all vegetables, fruits, cheese, water and coffee. Even cold pasta salads and my very favorite, carrot salad (made with grated carrots and raisins)." Chris King.*

## **Types of Vegetarian**

**1. Lacto-ovo-vegetarian.** Eats both dairy products and eggs. This is the most common type of vegetarian diet.

**2. Demi-vegetarian.** Persons who eat no meat, but may eat fish. Persons consuming fish but no meat are sometimes called pescetarians.

**3. Lacto-vegetarian.** Persons who eat dairy products, but not eggs.

**4. Vegan.** Persons who do not eat dairy products, eggs, or any other animal product. Many vegans also do not eat yeast products or honey, and may refuse the use of animal products such as leather, silk, wool, lanolin, gelatin, etc.

**5. Macrobiotic.** Persons whose diet consists of unpolished rice, pulses and vegetables with small additions of fermented foods, nuts, seeds and fruit. Animal products generally are not consumed although some may eat fish.

**6. Fruitarian.** A type of vegan diet where very few processed or cooked foods are eaten. Fruitarians believe only plant foods that can be harvested without killing the plant should be eaten.

*"Many vegans and vegetarians won't eat veggies that aren't organic due to side-effects of pesticides." Mel Edwards.*

## **Diabetes**

Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood.

A person with diabetes must carefully balance their diet based on a system of "food exchanges" from The Diabetes Food Pyramid, which divides food into six groups. The Diabetes Food Pyramid is a little different than the USDA Food Guide Pyramid because it groups foods based on their carbohydrate and protein content instead of their classification as a food. Diabetics are restricted to a specific number of servings from each category each day, based on their age, weight, sex, and physical condition.

## **The Diabetes Food Pyramid**

### **1. Grains and Starches**

These foods contain mostly carbohydrates. The foods in this group are made mostly of grains, such as wheat, rye, and oats. Starchy vegetables like potatoes, peas, and corn also belong to this group, along with dry beans such as black

eyed peas and pinto beans. Starchy vegetables and beans are in this group because they have about as much carbohydrate in one serving as a slice of bread. Serving sizes are: 1 slice of bread; 1/4 of a bagel (1 ounce); 1/2 an English muffin or pita bread; 16-inch tortilla; 3/4 cup dry cereal; 1/2 cup cooked cereal; 1/2 cup potato, yam, peas, corn, or cooked beans ; 1 cup winter squash; 1/3 cup of rice or pasta.

## **2. Vegetables**

This group includes spinach, chicory, sorrel, Swiss chard, broccoli, cabbage, bok choy, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and kale, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce. Starchy vegetables such as potatoes, corn, peas, and lima beans are counted in the starch and grain group for diabetes meal planning. Serving sizes are: 1 cup raw; 1/2 cup cooked.

## **3. Fruit**

This group includes blackberries, cantaloupe, strawberries, oranges, apples, bananas, peaches, pears, apricots, and grapes. Serving sizes are: 1/2 cup canned fruit; 1 small fresh fruit; 2 tbs dried fruit; 1 cup of melon or raspberries; 1 1/4 cup of whole strawberries.

## **4. Milk**

It is recommended that non-fat or low-fat dairy products be provided, as they offer taste without the saturated fat. A serving is: 1 cup non-fat or low-fat milk; 1 cup of yogurt.

## **5. Meat and Meat Substitutes**

The meat group includes beef, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, tofu, dried beans, cheese, cottage cheese and peanut butter. Choose from lean meats, poultry and fish and cut all the visible fat off meat. A serving equal to 1 oz of meat: 1/4 cup cottage cheese; 1 egg; 1 Tbsp peanut butter; 1/2 cup tofu

## **6. Fats, Sweets, and Alcohol**

Things like potato chips, candy, cookies, cakes, crackers, and fried foods contain a lot of fat or sugar. Keep servings small. Serving sizes include: 1/2 cup ice cream; 1 small cupcake or muffin; 2 small cookies.

*“Sugar free cookies and low carb baked goods are generally a wasted effort as they cost more and are substantially the same amount of carbs are the stuff made with sugar. Once eaten, all carbs turn to glucose.”* Karl Hallsten.

*“Splenda is the choice for many diabetics these days, as it is a sugar-based item and not a chemical compound.”* Mel Edwards.

## **Celiac Disease**

Celiac disease is a digestive disease that damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food.

People who have celiac disease cannot tolerate a protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, rye, and barley. A gluten-free diet means avoiding all foods that contain wheat (including spelt, triticale, and kamut), rye, and barley--in other words, most grain, pasta, cereal, and many processed foods. For example, instead of wheat flour, people can use potato, rice, soy, or bean flour. Alternatively, they can buy gluten-free bread, pasta, and other products from special food companies. Hidden sources of gluten include additives, preservatives, and stabilizers found in processed food, medicines, and mouthwash.

### Lactose Intolerance

A person with lactose intolerance lacks an enzyme that is needed to digest milk sugar, which causes symptoms such as gas, bloating, and abdominal pain.

Lactose is most often found in milk, cheeses, yogurt, ice cream and other dairy products. But, it doesn't stop there as lactose is added in many store-bought products such as some salad dressings, candy, cookies, biscuits, breads, and other baked goods, lunch meat, packaged rice mixes, instant potato mixes, and other such packaged mixes. Check the labels carefully and look for the words lactose, whey, dry milk, dry milk solids, or milk by-product. Lactose can also be found in some prescription drugs, but, well, you really shouldn't be sharing these!

### Kosher



<sup>TRR</sup>  
*"No meat and dairy in the same meal – not kosher, most observant Jews don't do this."* Mel Edwards.

Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods can and cannot be eaten, and how those foods must be prepared and eaten. "Kashrut" comes from the Hebrew root Kaf-Shin-Resh, meaning fit, proper or correct. It is the same root as the more commonly known word "kosher," which describes food that meets these standards.

There is no such thing as "kosher-style" food. Kosher is not a style of cooking. Certain animals may not be eaten at all. This restriction includes the flesh, organs, eggs and milk of the forbidden animals. Of the animals that may be eaten, the birds and mammals must be killed in accordance with Jewish law. Certain parts of permitted animals may not be eaten. Utensils that have come into contact with meat may not be used with dairy, and vice versa. Utensils that have come into contact with non-kosher food may not be used with kosher food. Grape products made by non-Jews may not be eaten.

Products that have been certified as kosher are labeled with a mark called a hekhsher that ordinarily identifies the rabbi or organization that certified the product. Approximately 3/4 of all prepackaged foods have some kind of kosher certification, and most major brands have reliable Orthodox certification. The most controversial certification is the K, a plain letter K found on products asserted to be kosher. A letter of the alphabet cannot be trademarked, so any manufacturer can put a K on a product. For example, Jell-O brand gelatin puts a K on its product, even though every reliable Orthodox authority agrees that Jell-O is not kosher.

## **JUST DESSERTS**

Almost everybody likes dessert! And unlike the above paragraphs, we're not all that picky about it. Still, there are some (few) reservations.

*"Popcorn is something that can get stuck in your throat if it isn't totally fresh."*  
Mary Lee Sweet.

If you put out dessert at a storytelling event, no matter what it is, it will get eaten. Fruits and cheese are popular desert staples. Cakes, cookies, brownies, ice cream, candies, all will quickly be devoured by your performers

*"I prefer fresh fruits and vegetables to sweets and desserts, but if sweets are provided, I do love to have some."* Judith Wynhausen.

If the dessert has chocolate in it, in any way, shape or form, it will disappear rapidly.

*"Since being diagnosed with diabetes, I have decided that Life is too short not to have the best chocolate – and I will pass on the cheap stuff."* Karl Hallsten.

## **SUMMARY**

*"The thing I hate is church dinners. Most of these have great food which I don't like to eat before a show. Afterward it's gone! Even if they hold a plate for you, it is not the same. Love doing the shows, though..."* Bob Shimer.

We all love doing the shows. Moreover, we all love eating. The difficult part is balancing the two. Knowing when to provide food, and providing the right types of foods and beverages, are critical to the success of the performers, and, therefore, critical to the success of the entire event. The best foods are those that are simple, easy to eat, offer a variety for individual selection, and leave the performer energized, rather than satiated and sleepy.

Bon appetite! And pass the dental floss...

**Contributors**

Sharon Kirk Clifton, Mel Edwards, Mary Garrett, Wendy Gourley, Marcia Gutierrez, Karl Hallsten, Lois Sprengnether Keel, Barbara Kellogg, Chris King, Lainie Levin, David Joe Miller, John Row, Margaret Schwallie, Bob Shimer, Mary Lee Sweet, Judith Wynhausen, and that terrific font of knowledge, Anonymous.

**Internet Sources:**

[www.jewfaq.org](http://www.jewfaq.org) – Judaism 101 by Tracey R. Rich

[www.vegsoc.org](http://www.vegsoc.org) – The Vegetarian Society

[www.ivu.org](http://www.ivu.org) – International Vegetarian Union

[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) – American Diabetes Association

[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov) - National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse