



TABLE MANNERS

That Take You Anywhere

by Linda Reece, Extension Home Furnishings Specialist

It's so easy to heat up a frozen dinner, pick up a pizza, eat in front of the television or stop at a fast-food place that good table manners may slide. Practicing good table manners at home will help family members feel more at ease whether dining at a friend's house, at a business lunch or at a fine restaurant. Behavior at the dining table shows a certain sensitivity to other people.

Good Table Manners

Sit correctly at the table. Maintain good posture with your feet on the floor. Keep your hands in your lap or rest them on the edge of the table. Quiet hands look better than hands playing with food or flatware or drumming your fingers on the table. It's all right to rest your elbows on the table between courses, but when you are eating, keep them off the table and as close to your body as possible.

Pass food in a counterclockwise direction around the table. Take a modest portion of whatever is passed (you can always go back for more). Use "please" and "thank you" as you ask the person nearest to an item to pass it to you. It may be accepted to add sauces and spices to your food at home, but when dining out, it can be an insult to the cook to "drown" your food with bottled sauces or pour salt and pepper over all of the food before you have even tasted it.

Cut meat one piece at a time, then eat it before cutting another piece. Take small bites of food and eat quietly and slowly. Swallow each mouthful before talking or taking another bite. Do not try to talk while you are still chewing food. This does not look good, and people will not be able to understand all the witty things you are saying!

If you want a second helping in your own home, ask for it. However, if you are a guest in someone else's home, don't ask. If there is more, it will be offered to you. If there isn't more of what you have requested, everyone becomes embarrassed.

If you are a guest in someone's home, follow your host's lead. Don't eat or drink anything before you determine whether grace will be said. Wait until everyone

has been served and the hostess or the woman guest of honor picks up her fork before you start to eat.

When you are eating at a restaurant with friends, it is proper to exchange small samplings of the different dishes you have ordered. To do this, ask for two or three small clean plates. Then transfer the samples onto these plates before you start eating.

If you are on a special diet and are invited to a friend's house for dinner, discuss it with your host before the event. Offer to eat at home and join the group right after dinner. Or you can pretend to eat or simply eat those foods you are allowed to eat and skip the rest. Never force or expect your host to prepare a special meal for you.

Flatware sometimes poses a problem. Grasp a fork or spoon with your thumb and forefinger about three-quarters of the way up the handle. The thumb pushes against the back of the forefinger on top of the handle and the other three fingers fit beneath the handle. When cutting something with a knife, hold your fork in your left hand, grasping it about two-thirds down the handle. The thumb gives pressure from the bottom, and the forefinger provides pressure from the top and is a little closer to the fork tines than the thumb. Hold the knife in your right hand with the thumb and middle finger about halfway down the handle. The forefinger presses down firmly on top of the blade at the point where it joins the handle. Never grasp either the knife or fork in a clenched fist as you are eating or cutting food. A knife should be placed in resting position on the upper right side of your plate with the sharp blade side turned inward. As you pause in eating, rest your fork, tines up, next to it on its left. This is also the position of your flatware when you are finished eating. Place the spoon on the undersaucer; do not leave it sticking up in a glass, cup or compote.

As soon as you sit down at the table, spread your napkin across your lap. Luncheon-sized napkins are completely unfolded while larger dinner napkins are only half unfolded. Napkins stay in your lap until you rise to

leave. Blot your fingers and mouth often with your napkin. Also use it to blot at minor spills during the meal. If you must leave the table during the meal, place your napkin on the seat of your chair, not on the table. When the meal is finished and everyone is leaving, fold your napkin (not necessarily neatly) and leave it on the table. An exception to this is in the use of napkin rings. In this case, simply fold the napkin and replace it in the ring before leaving the table.

Special Problems At Mealtimes

Catching Food in Your Teeth. Never use a toothpick or your fork to try to dislodge food while seated at the table. Either try drinking some water or excuse yourself and go to the bathroom and vigorously rinse or brush your teeth.

A Bug Appears in Your Salad. If a little bug crawls out of your salad, pick it up quickly with your napkin and put it under the table (dead). Don't point it out or talk about it and possibly ruin the rest of the meal for everyone at the table.

When You Love Garlic or Onion. If you feel that the amount of onion or garlic consumed at a meal is making you unpopular, consider one of the following alternatives:

- *Chew and swallow some fresh parsley.*
- *Rub a piece of lemon over your tongue and the insides of your mouth (in private).*
- *Chew a few coffee beans.*
- *Take some antacid.*

Eating "Difficult" Vegetables

The four vegetables considered most difficult to eat are peas, corn on the cob, artichokes and asparagus. Use a small piece of bread or roll to help shove peas onto your fork, if needed. Hopefully, corn on the cob will be served only at picnics or outdoor dinners. If not, butter and season a few rows at a time and eat them as gracefully as possible.

Artichokes are consumed leaf by leaf. As you pull off a leaf, dip the rounded, soft, meaty end of it into the sauce and eat the leaf up to the part that is hard and inedible. Discard it neatly in a pile on your plate. After you have eaten your way down to the central, gray, fuzzy part (the "choke"), spear it with your fork and cut off the gray feathery part under it. Cut out the round-on-top gray heart from its bed of larger leaves and dip it. If it's large, cut it into smaller pieces before eating. (This artichoke heart is tender, full of flavor and often considered the best part of this vegetable.)

Depending on how long it is cooked and how much sauce is on it, fresh asparagus can be eaten either with your fingers or with a knife and fork. Firm stalks that have been steamed a short time and are relatively sauce-free can be considered finger food. Eat down to the tough, inedible part and place the stalks back on the plate in a neat pile. If the asparagus is overcooked and the stalk

flexible or covered with sauce, use your knife and fork to cut it into small portions before eating.

Eating Pasta

The easiest way to eat noodles or spaghetti is with a fork in your right hand and a large dessert-size spoon (or a piece of bread) in your left. Pile a proper amount of pasta on your fork and support it by pushing the spoon against it or twirling the ends in the bowl of the spoon. Then lean close to the table and bring the fork to your mouth. A purist will not use a spoon, but instead twine a small number of strands around the fork. (This takes practice to do it well.) Children are the only ones who should actually cut the spaghetti into small, manageable pieces with a fork.

Special Foods

Many foods are considered finger foods, including crisp bacon strips, French fries, pizza, strips of raw vegetables and many other items. A good etiquette book provides answers to most questions on dealing with problem foods and special situations.

Like lemon on your salad or on fish, but are afraid to use it because the lemon slice may squirt juice on you and other diners? Solve this problem by pricking the slice two or three times with your fork and then squeezing it on the top of the food.

Dining in Restaurants

Good manners are just as important in a restaurant as they are at a dinner party at home. The one in charge is the maitre d' (headwaiter), who seats you at your table. Depending on how fine a restaurant it is, the captain may take your order and supervise the service for your table. There may be a wine steward to take and serve drinks, a server who serves you and a busser who assists with service and keeps your water glass filled. In many family restaurants, a hostess will seat you, the server will take your order, and the busser will fill the water glasses.

Reservations

Call ahead and make reservations if you are going to a popular "in" place, if you are taking guests, or if you are part of a large group. If hosting a luncheon or dinner, it's a good idea to ask about food preferences before booking a table at a place featuring such foods such as Asian, Indian, Mexican or fish. Be very specific about the date, time and place when you invite others. Also, make it clear who is paying. If you have invited a guest, you will be expected to pay unless it is clear that you will be splitting the check.

Hosting a Meal

As host, plan to arrive at least five minutes early. Greet the first guests at the entrance and accompany them to the table. Other guests can be directed to the table by

the maitre d' or hostess. If a coat check service is available, encourage your guests to use it (unless they are wearing fur coats). If you are an invited guest and arrive before the host, you may either wait at the entrance or be seated at the table. If the host has not arrived within ten or fifteen minutes, you have the right to order a beverage. Guests should always be given the best seats (against the wall on banquette seats, inside seating at booths or seats facing the main part of the room.) The headwaiter usually pulls out the chair to seat the hostess or women guests. Your handbag should be kept in your lap and other items stashed away under your seat, not on the chair next to you.

Your server will mention any specialties of the restaurant. Hosts should offer suggestions or inquire about special or unfamiliar dishes. If a host suggests items in the low or middle price range, guests should follow suit and order in that price range. If you are in a restaurant specializing in foreign cuisine and do not understand the menu, don't hesitate to ask the server to explain exactly what the main dishes are — what they are made of and how they are prepared. This is particularly important if you have any food allergies.

When the server comes for your order, give him (or her) your full attention. If you keep changing your mind or if everyone is joking and talking, orders can't be taken properly, and errors may be made. Don't try to get the server's attention by calling "Hey" or "Miss" or by snapping your fingers; instead, say "Waiter" (or "Wait-

ress"). With an alert server, direct eye contact and a slight lift of the hand will be all that is needed. If something goes wrong with the order, don't voice loud criticisms at the server. Keep your voice low and explain what needs to be changed or corrected. It's possible that other factors, such as the kitchen staff, may be responsible for what went wrong. If service was truly poor, save criticisms for the manager or write a letter to the management after you return home.

While in a restaurant, keep conversation going and enjoy both your meal and companions. Avoid shouting and loud talking. Table hopping and talking on a telephone while at the table may be considered attempts to draw attention to yourself. If you have a working luncheon, keep papers and documents under control for the convenience of your server. Try to avoid eating so slowly that you hold up everyone else and make them uncomfortable. If you have a long sneezing fit, quickly excuse yourself and go to the restroom. At the end of the meal, women may quickly refresh their lipstick. Other makeup activities should be done in the restroom.

If you have been invited to a luncheon or dinner, always write a thank-you note to your host within at least three days' time. It does not have to be longer than three sentences, but it will show appreciation for your host's thoughtfulness and show that you have good manners. If you have been someone's guest, plan to reciprocate by treating your host to a return meal.

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