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Dining Etiquette 101, Part 2

Part 1 of this series contained a quiz on dining etiquette (see pg. 144 of the November 2013 issue of BIC). How did you fare — achieved a shining star or discovered dining etiquette is still a challenge for you?

In Part 2 are additional guidelines to master, but keep in mind the right moves can make a big difference, both professionally and personally.

- Sorbet — At some formal dinners, sorbet will be served after the first course. This is not dessert. It is to cleanse the palate. Eat it before continuing with the next course.

- Eating unfamiliar foods — If faced with a food you're not sure how to eat, you have three choices on how to proceed: Wait until someone else starts to eat and follow suit; ask how the food should be eaten (fingers or fork) or avoid the food altogether.

- Sending food back — If you need to send food back, don't feel awkward. This is appropriate if your dish is not what you ordered, isn't cooked to order, tastes spoiled or you discover a hair in the dish. You should discreetly inform the waiter of the situation and ask for a replacement.

- Seasoning your food — When eating out, you should taste your food before seasoning it. Covering a dish with salt and pepper or drowning it in steak sauce can be insulting to the chef, implying the cuisine needs improving upon. If this action takes place during a job interview, it could be perceived you are "making a decision without all the facts."

- Cutting food into many bites — Don't cut up your entire meal of a large piece of meat, pancake or waffle before you start to eat. Cut only one or two bites at a time.

- Chewing food — Once you start to eat, take a manageable bite, chew it well and swallow it before taking another. Also remember smacking, slurping and collecting food in a ball in one cheek are major faux pas, as are talking and drinking with your mouth full.

- Handling bread — When the bread basket is being passed, take a piece and place it on your bread plate. Use your butter knife to take a portion of butter and place it on your bread plate as well. When eating a piece of bread, break off a small piece, butter it and eat it. Do not tear off more than one piece at a time.

- When to begin eating — You should wait until all members of your group have been served before you start eating. At a private dinner, observe the host and begin when he does. When at a buffet, you may start when there are others seated at your table.

- Removing unwanted food from mouth — To avoid embarrassment, you may be more comfortable excusing yourself and going to the restroom to remove the unwanted food.

- Using a finger bowl — If you encounter a finger bowl (used either after eating a meal with your hands, such as lobster, or at a more formal meal when dessert is served), dip

your fingers into the water and dry them with your napkin.

- Dropping your napkin — If you drop your napkin, retrieve it yourself if you can. If recovering the napkin would disrupt the meal, ask the server for a replacement.

- Sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose — When sneezing or coughing at the table is unavoidable, cover your nose or mouth with a napkin and turn to the side. Don't use a napkin to blow your nose. Excuse yourself and go to the restroom.

- Crooking your pinky — Don't crook your pinky finger when picking up a cup or glass. It tends to be an artificial mannerism.

- Requesting a doggy box — It's fine to take leftover food home from a restaurant, except on a date, high profile occasion or business lunch/dinner.

Being at ease when dining — whether for breakfast, lunch or dinner — means being able to enjoy the company and the food. If you spend your time at the table being anxious about doing the right thing at the right time, the experience loses its pleasure and its purpose. As Debby Mayne mentions in her blog, *Etiquette*, at www.about.com, "Don't ever beat yourself up over any etiquette faux pas. Look ahead and try not to make the same mistakes again."

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