

The Dinner Bell

When I was in my 30's I vowed I would never eat my dinner before 7PM. I thought that was more sophisticated and I didn't understand the idea of an early bird special. That was totally alien. That was for the very old. My goal was to be a big-city woman and eat at a civilized hour and 7PM or later was civilized. It meant you had grown up. In large cities I was even known to dine at 10:30PM or later. That might be an after-theatre dinner.

I was so set on this 7PM or later thing that when my mother-in-law came to visit for a week, I stuck to my 7PM serving time, even though I knew darn well my mother-in-law was used to eating earlier. My justification was that it took me that long to get home from work, prep and serve a decent home-cooked meal.

My mother-in-law talked about how she preferred to eat earlier but she was polite and waited until dinner was served.

She never ate all her dinner. She sort of picked at it but I didn't realize that when you're in your 60's you probably can't handle a meal that big, that late, but that's a discussion for later. Today we are talking about what time to eat.

My husband found this data in a news-information little newsletter he gets each morning. It said:

Good morning. If you had to guess, when would you say most Americans eat dinner? Fine, we'll tell you: 6:19pm. That's peak dinnertime for the biggest share of American households, according to a FlowingData analysis of the American Time Use Survey.

And what about individual states? Peak dinnertime differs a lot.

- *Pennsylvanians eat dinner the earliest (5:37pm), followed by Maine, Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota, and New Hampshire.*
- *Washington, DC, residents eat the latest dinner (7:10pm), preceded by Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas.*

And we know where your mind just went: Does that correlate with the age of each state's population? Our very unscientific answer is...somewhat. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are the oldest states in the country.

—Molly Liebergall, Matty Merritt, Cassandra Cassidy, Abby Rubenstein, Neal Freyman

So that leads me to a similar conversation I heard this week on the Today Show.

They were talking about the phenomenon of people eating earlier. Because those folks all get up about 3AM to go to work, they also eat dinner earlier.

Al Roker, the Today Show's Meteorologist, was talking about how years ago he could go to a restaurant at 5PM and the place would be wide open. He could eat his dinner and leave about 6:30 and the place still was not full. He talked about how today the restaurants are packed by about 5:30. Things have totally changed.

I heard a story about a guy who lived in Japan and he said folks there go home from work these days. It's not cool anymore to go out for 2 hours of drinks, then eat dinner and maybe drink a bit more before going home. In their culture that is looked down upon now.

In my household I moved my dinner service time to 6:30 from 7 or later. Does that mean I'm getting old? Or am I smarter in some way?

When my husband and I go out for a dinner we have no problem making a reservation for 6PM or maybe even a little earlier.

Seems to me times are a changing (dinner times) all over. What do you think?

Cheers,