

## Columnists

### **The Baird Facts: Brownie batter, comin' up**

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BEVERLY, MASS. –

A long time ago, or before I had children so it feels like a long time ago, I made a batch of brownies. Along the way I ate a fair bit of the batter, which after all, was mostly what I wanted. What I mostly got was salmonella.

I was so sick that I called my doctor and begged him for something, anything, to make the stomach pain go away. He prescribed me some pills that were completely unremarkable and ineffective and then he said, "I bet you'll never eat brownie batter again. That'll teach you, won't it?"

That'll teach you?? What professional planet did that nugget of physician wisdom drop from? I wanted to reach through the phone (with my salmonella sapped strength) and teach him something. But though I did drop him as my doctor, I didn't eat brownie batter again for a very, very, long time.

Fast forward to the present. I now have children — two young girls — and they, like their mother, enjoy brownies. Recently we whipped some up that had a cookie topping. The brownie portion called for one egg. The cookie portion had zero. And in a burst of parental statistical analysis, I decided that I didn't want one obnoxious doctor to ruin my girls' childhood. Really, what were the odds? So I let them each have a lick of the cookie batter with a dab, a mere hint, of the brownie batter.

Later, after a lunch of PB&J, blueberries, and brownies for dessert, my 5-year-old daughter sat on the couch. She was telling a story when suddenly, completely out of nowhere, she turned into a human fountain. I don't want to gross you out, but I do want to let you know that digested blueberries and grape jelly mixed with brownie stain more than you can possibly imagine. They stain walls, they stain blankets, and they certainly stained this Mommy who caught the fire-hose force of it in her lap.

Reluctantly, I blamed the brownie batter while harboring irritation for the long-gone doctor who I imagined was shaking his head.

Two days later, recovery in hand, we were back to normal and back to PB&J and blueberries, though we did skip dessert. Additionally, my older daughter, still a bit woozy, passed on the blueberries. So it came as quite a shock when later that evening, my 3-year-old daughter turned to me with an odd, fish-like, look on her face.

I was slow, oh so slow, on the take. And once again, I became the recipient of blueberries and grape jelly in a most horrendous way. My younger daughter spared the walls but took out half of the kitchen as we ran for modern plumbing.

And yet, all I could think of as I pulled her hair into the now familiar Yucky-Tummy-Ponytail, was that I was vindicated. It was NOT the brownies! My husband set up a bucket brigade and we spent much of the night cleaning it, and our daughter, while cursing the blueberries . . . because clearly, obviously, it was the blueberries.

Once again, we stumbled into recovery, albeit a bit bleary eyed. Still, the problem was solved. Until that is my sitter texted me another two days later with a simple message: "Puking."

I panicked. For all my consternation over food poisoning, self-induced or otherwise, it was, at least, controllable. But if it wasn't the brownies, and it wasn't the blueberries then . . . it was a bug. A typical, contagious, stomach bug. It meant that even though I had won the brownie batter battle, I was losing the war. The imaginary doctor snickered in my head, because we both knew that my husband and I were walking stomach bombs waiting to, well, go off.

So we waited. We passed the 24-hour mark but we knew that was nothing to celebrate. Every wave had occurred two days apart. Slowly, agonizingly, with every hiccup or ache analyzed for its potential, we waited. And then . . . nothing . . . we had escaped unscathed.

Finally!

Finally we had logged enough hours, days, weeks and years. We'd been sneezed on, coughed on, thrown up on and covered in toxins enough times that we had achieved the ultimate parental milestone: we were immune.

Oh, I know what the smug doctor would say. He'd say there is no such thing as parental immunity. He'd say we still shouldn't eat brownie batter and I ought to wash my fruits more thoroughly and that I'll just never learn. Yawn. I'm done with him. In parenting there are just some things you can't teach.

Brownies anyone?

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