

COMMON SENSENIG

Super Bowl parties can be a real gas

In case you've been living under Keith Richards' water bottle, the coming weekend is a big one for sports fans.

For the XL time in history, the Super Bowl will showcase the best of the best in professional football, as two teams leave it all on the field for a chance at the championship.

For the XXL time in history, fans of both football and commercials (the latter of which only seem to appear this time of year) will gather in homes across the country to watch a little football, cross their fingers in hopes of avoiding a Mick Jagger wardrobe malfunction and eat a — to quote another classic rock band — whole lotta food.

Super Bowl Sunday is one of the biggest party nights of the year, although being on a Sunday night tempers at least some of the massive amounts of drinking that usually goes on at parties. However, millions of pigskin partiers (not to mention coworkers on Monday) find out that a night's worth of binging on nachos, hot dogs, chili, baked beans, meatballs and chicken wings can have a different, equally unfortunate hangover-like effect on the human body.

This is where author Bill Downs comes into play. A nutritional biochemist, Bill is an authority on diet and digestion.

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According to his blog site on the Internet, www.trafon.org (spell it backwards), Bill's experience as a nutrition consultant gave him an appreciation of the body's ability to heal itself when maintained by appropriate nutrition. (For those keeping score at home, cheddar-filled bratwursts, spare ribs and deep-fried shrimp poppers do not qualify as "appropriate nutrition" — I asked.)

Known to host the occasional Super Bowl shindig, I decided a chat with the doctor of digestion may be in order before this weekend's festivities.

I started the conversation by rattling off a list of potential items that may be served at a small gathering at my household this year: subs, pizza rolls, meatballs, wings, spicy chicken

wraps, chip dip — you know, the basics.

On the other end of the line, I hear what sounds like a heavy door squeaking and slamming shut, followed by a dead bolt locking.

"Everything OK over there?" I ask.

"Oh don't mind me, I'm just getting into my bomb shelter," Bill says. "That party you're throwing has the potential to register on the Richter scale."

The key to quelling gaseous eruptions from your guests depends on a whole lot more than what you have warming in the crock pot before kickoff, according to Mr. Downs.

"The real issue that affects the influence of a Super Bowl meal is the lifestyle tactics that led up to that day," he said.

I gulp, audibly.

"If you (or your guests) primarily eat processed garbage food — the typical American diet," he continued, "you may not be able to take it long enough to stick around for the first commercial break."

Yikes, this could be bad. As the Stones say, "Gimme Shelter," indeed.

Well, we have a whole four days until the big game to prepare our gastrointestinal systems for the abuse it's going to be taking in the form of fatty food piled atop paper plates.

"Is there still time to avoid Mt. Vesuvius in the living room?" I asked.

Bill suggested taking the "living off the land" approach, eating more foods that prosper in the little corner of the world we call northwest Ohio — apples, celery, berries and the like.

"Can you dip them in French onion dip?" I ask.

"Listen," Bill said. "You've got to prepare yourself for the endurance race of gorging yourself ... You may want to eat a bowl of oatmeal in the morning to prepare yourself for what you're about to consume later in the day."

"Do you think spicy buffalo sauce would make a good topping on that?" I respond.

Bill, seemingly realizing that keeping a football fan away from digestion-dangerous foods on Sunday is like keeping Keith Richards away from the bourbon before soundcheck, left me with one final bit of advice to keep the air clear on Sunday, so to speak.

"If you're going to eat kielbasa, at least lace kielbasa with some organic produce."

Mental note to self: throw out the cheese variety — must look for the berry-stuffed bratwurst at the grocery store.

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