

# fear of frying

For lovers of food and cooking, peril lurks at every turn, says Sally Feldman, and having to buy clothes a few sizes bigger is the least of our worries

**A**t the risk of putting you off your Easter feasting, I've been reading some alarming material on the dangers of eating certain foods on festive occasions. And no, it's not the usual harping on about how the consumption of three kilos of chocolate eggs in one sitting is likely to coat your arteries with such efficiency that you won't see in next Christmas. We all know how dangerous the most delicious food is – how the marbling in wagyu is what makes it taste so good (and what will surely kill you before you've written that definitive Great Australian Barbecue Book); and how a croissant is a lethal weapon when eaten by anyone who isn't from France (which, sadly, is a book that's been written already).

And it's in France that this tale unfolds, where, apparently, hundreds of people are rushed to hospitals after inflicting mortal wounds upon themselves while gaily shucking

of dysfunctional dining. So much so, that I can safely say that it not only led to the breakdown of a marriage, but to my father's bachelor version of spaghetti with meatballs (may he, and they, rest in peace). Each meal for the 20-odd years of their married life was prefaced with a couple of whiskies (my father) and a Valium (my mother) and ended with a culinary post-mortem (my father) and another Valium (you guessed it). Amazingly, this has not put me off cooking or eating or, come to think of it, a little light self-medication... although my mother gave up the first shortly after she'd moved out, and has steadfastly refused to take it up again, despite her once-legendary shortcrust.

Danger also lies in kitchen design, whatever your marital status: too small a work space and there's no room for that mega food processor. Instead, you whisk your egg whites by hand with an elephantine balloon whisk, then realise

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oysters or opening cans of foie gras. And there I was thinking that it was the geese that suffered...

Of course, shucking oysters requires no little dexterity and strength.

And sure, after a couple of flutes of the prerequisite bubbles, anyone is going to have a bit of trouble cutting through that irksome muscle keeping the shell shut.

But it's not the knife that does the damage, apparently, apart from severing the occasional tendon, artery or nerve; it's the bacteria on the little bits of oyster shell that you've got to watch out for, which will enter your bloodstream via the knife blade and infect you horribly. In chronic cases it may result in reduced hand movements. Imagine, speaking French without being able to gesticulate! *Quel horreur!*

This got me thinking about the potential tragedy inherent in preparing and consuming even the most innocuous of meals. My parents were the perfect example

halfway through the recipe that you've no icing sugar, so you jump in the car and drive to the local shops, but your shoulder goes into spasm from all the whisking, and you swerve the car and hit a lamp post and end up in traction in hospital. Too big a bench top and there's plenty of room for an espresso machine, so rather than going out for coffee like civilised people, you make it at home; but because you're in a hurry, you spill it all over your clothes and throw them into the washing machine. And just as you realise you've left your mobile phone in your capris, the machine's going through its first spin cycle...

So where does this leave the timid food lover? Man cannot live by wholemeal alone, especially if it's made overnight in a bread-making machine in a house without a smoke alarm. Perhaps that's why cooking shows are so popular – just like kayaking solo up the Amazon from the safety of the Discovery Channel, we can watch those reckless souls beat and whip and macerate knowing that nothing they do can hurt us, except when the glossy, 500-page, fully illustrated cookbook based on the show falls on our head as we're trying to reach it on the kitchen shelf. **VE+T**

