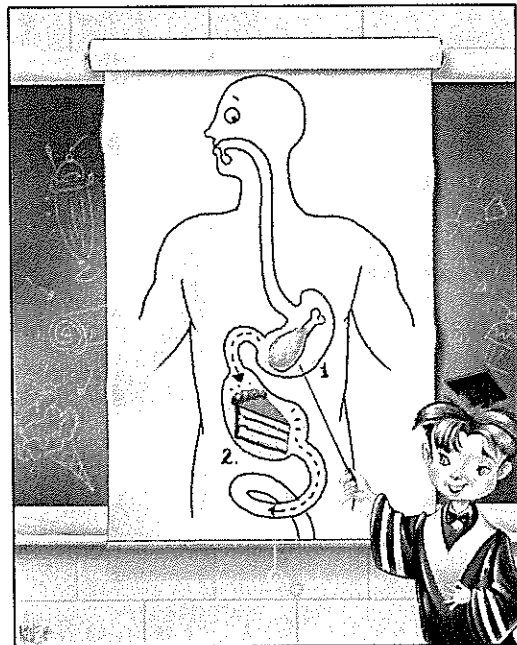


# A tale of two stomachs

By Nicole Kraft

Illustration by Mario Noche



The carrot sits half gnawed on a picked-through bed of salad greens. Applesauce clings in frosting-like blobs to the sides of a small bowl. A lone bite of chicken lies stranded amid the sea of the blue plate. And, invariably, the question comes: “Can I have dessert?”

My 10-year-old son, Danny, is not alone in his affection for the post-dinner confections that seem to put a contented sigh on any meal. But what impresses me most is no matter how much—or how little—he eats, he always says he has room for a peanut butter and chocolate Newman-O’s, a dunker from Trader Joe’s or, when he’s really lucky, a stop by the Groovy Spoon for a do-it-yourself yogurt concoction. (“It has probiotics,” he tells me, as if he has any idea what that does for him.)

As someone who does not crave dessert, I couldn’t fathom how a child who struggles to recall which day to take out the trash or locate a library book six inches from his hand continually remembers—and finds room for—dessert after every dinner.

It is, he explains, a key component of his internal workforce. Yes, workforce.

And so I was introduced to the Body Brigade.

Danny says that the Body Brigade is a fleet of Lilliputian-sized people who operate his bodily activities every day. And among the busiest are the crews that staff the two branch offices of his stomachs—one for regular meals and one for dessert.

It’s the Brigade members, he tells me, who decide when Danny gets hungry and what he likes to eat.

While the main-meal workers are on the clock starting around 7 am, the dessert crew is in prep mode, but it jumps into action as soon as dinner duties are completed.

The treat team then gets the dessert stomach fired up and in gear—and by committee vote chooses just which sweets the boy’s body needs.

The stomach staffs are hardworking groups, but they’re far from alone in the body, Danny says. There actually are workers in every segment—making hair grow, stitching up scrapes and cuts, helping those baby teeth break free from their moorings and guiding permanent teeth into place.

Danny even has a special crew working overtime maintaining the braces he wore from July 2010 through December—those teeth don’t straighten on their own, you know.

When I point out to Danny that these laborers must get pretty tired of working day after day, year after year, without even Christmas or Thanksgiving off, he says new workers are being hired regularly.

Each growth spurt leads to a hiring wave; they come in via the water supply. Trainees get the easy jobs, such as making snot, and older workers are assigned less demanding duties, such as toenail growth.

The most coveted job, by far, is the dessert team that preps the sweets stomach for its one big moment of the day—when it anticipates, sets the agenda for and receives the manna from, well, Mom.

And that, Danny says, is where I have been causing some labor problems.

There is no room for error—or slackers—in the dessert stomach, and when a treat is not forthcoming (as punishment; when we are traveling; if I forget), the managers perceive that the dessert stomach is not working up to its performance standards.

The result: Layoffs.

No reassignments—just dismissal.

And you can only imagine the route the displaced workers have to take to get out of that part of the body.

Unless I want Danny’s own unemployment rate to climb to uncomfortable numbers, he says, I better get with the program and start infusing them with some capital—preferably in the currency of chocolate.

Guess I better start banking the Newman-O’s for tough economic times ahead. ■

Nicole Kraft is a freelance writer and an Ohio State journalism professor.