

Processed Pork.



Oftentimes when I'm finishing a day's work, a train of thought will run through my head. This train of thought goes as follows: *you need to go to the shop after work*, it says. *And when you go to the shop after work, you're not going to buy, and then immediately consume, a four pack of Melton Mowbray mini pork pies.*

Right you are, I'll tell the train, and I'll hop on the bus back home. I'll cruise to the supermarket, mulling over a shopping list for that night's tea. Broccoli, perhaps. Risotto rice, or pasta; maybe the time has come to top up the spice cabinet. What I won't be doing - as agreed - is sauntering over to the fresh meat snacks region of the supermarket to purchase a four pack of Melton Mowbray mini pork pies, then immediately consuming the same upon exiting the shop¹.

And I can be telling myself this same tale as I glide, trance-like, to the *verboten* shelf. As I reach out a seasoned arm towards the four pack of Melton Mowbray mini pork pies, which I know from previous experience I don't really want, and will not really enjoy. As I place them in my basket then scuttle from the aisle like an unlicensed motorist at the scene of a prang. As I pack up the shopping in such an order as to ensure that my recently purchased four pack of Melton Mowbray mini pork pies takes pride of place at the top of my Bag for Life.

As I methodically make my way through each pie in turn, first a large semicircular bite which deals with most of the innards, then two smaller bites which are mostly crust. As I castigate myself for failing, once again, to refrain from purchasing and immediately consuming a four pack of Melton Mowbray mini pork pies while I hurriedly stuff the wrapper in a public bin, safe in the knowledge I cannot be linked to this culinary crime.

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I try my best to conduct myself, in my life, in general, with a modicum of decorum. I listen to the ideas of others; I'm presentable and polite; I'm not, in the main, I hope, what you'd classify as an oaf<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cards on the table at this point - if I've not wrenched open the packaging *prior* to exiting the shop, I'm counting that as a major win.

<sup>2</sup> It's worth noting upfront that, while no adonis, no trim slice of prime beef, I am not what you'd call a portly man. I'm of average size, or slightly above. A dad bod.

But there's something about that shelf, something so tantalising about those rows of packaged processed pork goods, that has me hypnotised, unlocks my inner glutton. I know they're bad for me, that they're full of fat and carcinogens and sodium and the like. I know that, in an ideal world, I shouldn't be eating animals full stop. I know they're going to ruin my dinner. Try and get between me and the wares I seek, though, and you're liable to get trampled.



The purchase itself is a process fraught with potential embarrassment. Before I snag the product I desire, I must survey the scene, like a leopard might. Ideally, there's no one in the vicinity, no one to witness my shady behavior. I can take stock then, take in the lay of the land. Is it the pork pies that call out to me today, or the half dozen six-inch sausage rolls<sup>3</sup>? Perhaps a scotch egg is more my speed this particular afternoon, either full sized or in the tiny picnic variety. On a quiet day I can find myself lost in a reverie of swine potential, weighing up my options before moving in for the kill.

If the supermarket is busy, though? Well, that depends entirely on the clientele. Say there's another man like me - a common or garden bloke - browsing the shelves. In this scenario, I'll stride confidently alongside him, and the two of us will make our selection with a wary solidarity. We'll stop short of exchanging pleasantries - *going for the scotch, are you? Fine choice, brother*. But there's a certain unspoken greedy camaraderie between two grown men who are perfectly within their rights to make an instantly regrettable porcine purchase.

If there's an attractive woman lurking nearby, however? Now that's a different story. Even as someone in a happy, long term relationship<sup>4</sup>, if there's a respectable lady, particularly a good looking one, lingering near the refrigerated shelving unit, I'm stymied, big time. What am I afraid of? It's hard to say. Perhaps there's a network of local women trading information on which men are sinking their gnashers into pork treats with worrying regularity. Perhaps she'll make a public spectacle of me for the sheer cruel sport of it. At any rate, I'll reconsider my approach. Maybe I'll take another lap around the miscellaneous middle aisle; maybe I'll just dart an arm out and grab the most conveniently located piggy pack, whatever that may be, then depart with my head down. I'll get my goods, alright - but it's not the relaxing shopping experience I crave.

Of course, I never countenance the possibility that she, too, was browsing the processed pork snacks for her own delectation - even though I know full well there are women

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<sup>3</sup> Stingily stuffed with hog as they are - I still can't resist.

<sup>4</sup> One which even my worst nights on the hog hopefully couldn't damage.

who openly consume such items with nary a shred of shame<sup>5</sup>. The whys and wherefores of this are too complex for me to get into - one for the psychiatrist, perhaps!

The final obstacle in my path to glum mastication is the purchase. As far as my excessive consumption of processed pork products goes, the self-checkout machine is the great enabler. Had the device never been invented, had I to look into the eyes of another human every time I wished to purchase a double pack of meat-clad eggs or a sharing box of cocktail sausages<sup>6</sup>, I would have indulged in but a fraction of the processed swine I have eaten.

Curse the self-checkout machine, then, but bless it, too. As one of the afflicted, a man who simply must, from time to time, fill myself with processed pork, I am relieved that the interaction is kept to a minimum while I pay for my mucky indulgences. There's still the shame that comes when something goes wrong with a machine and an attendant must rush to your aid, only to see that the issue stems from an improperly scanned jumbo sausage roll - but these are the risks one must take.

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How do you eat yours? The consumption of a processed pork snack in public is a tricky matter, requiring a bespoke approach for each item. While some delicacies require a covert operation, others simply require a little finesse to make your deviancy a tad less apparent. The following techniques are field tested, and I'd like to think that the results speak for themselves.

(It's worth noting before we go on that some folks will chow down on processed pork without a shred of self consciousness. I applaud you - but I neither understand nor, somehow, respect you.)



Sausage roll: I'm far less concerned about being caught on a long lens tucking into a sausage roll than I am any of the other Big Four processed pork snacks. After much soul searching, I've concluded that this is because the sausage roll is more substantial than other porcine products, almost on par with a sandwich in terms of sustenance provided⁷. At a party, I would cheerfully take a mini sausage roll (or several!) from a buffet table with nary a sideways glance. Not a problem, nothing to see here.

⁵ Indeed, a woman confidently munching down a scotch egg is among the most alluring sights these eyes have ever taken in.

⁶ "Sharing" - I have to laugh!

⁷ That's not to say that there aren't sandwiches that wouldn't fill me with shame were I to be caught half way through them. The Tesco breakfast triple springs to mind.

On the street, though, I won't throw caution to the wind altogether. I'll discard the wrapping sharpish - and I most certainly won't take a bite of the thing while walking past anyone coming in the opposite direction. To paraphrase Mark Twain, better to remain silent and be thought a sausage roll eater than to bite and remove all doubt⁸.

Mini pork pie: I keep the pie curled between my fingers, and (as detailed) stick to a regimented "three bites and you're out system". The mini pie is one of the less common processed pork items to be found on the street, and so I chew with impunity, confident no one will suspect that *this* is what I've chosen to fuel myself with.

The packet itself remains safely in the shopping bag, and I dart in and out as necessary. The packaging, I should note, has by this time been shredded out of all recognition. I have no intention of consuming anything less than the entire pack of pork pies; there is no reason for the cellophane wrapper to be kept in any kind of nick. These pies shall not see the inside of a fridge again.

Scotch egg: Let's not muck about: I eat this as though it were an apple. The Scotch egg is, to my mind, the most oafish of all the processed pork snacks, the purist's choice, and as such I take special measures to ensure that my actions are obfuscated.

I bury the egg in my palm, curling my fingers around to enclose as much of the offal orb as possible. I indulge in a whimsical ritual before the inaugural chomp - I rattle the egg around in its meat prison, an enjoyable sensation if you've never tried it. I wait until the coast is clear, then take my first bite.

As opposed to the pork pie, the debut munch of the Scotch is somewhat demure. I'm merely finding my feet, sizing the sausage-covered sphere up for the second, cataclysmic meeting of teeth, pork, and egg. In my haste to have the whole sordid ritual over with ASAP, this second bite is usually far too big, and my mouth struggles to deal with the sudden insertion of the driest item known to man. Before long, it's gone, and I regain my breath while cursing myself for once again buying something so simultaneously disgusting and alluring⁹.

Cocktail sausages: There's something particularly unseemly about being caught eating cocktail sausages¹⁰, a treat no grown adult would admit to enjoying. I feel obliged to keep the package entirely obscured. The packs, however, are so generous (I'm a 30 man myself, though I'll hear arguments for advantages of the 20 - keep 'em wanting more. I'd be lying if I said I'd never worked my way through a full 40 deck, though I'm generally able to talk myself out of

⁸ This should go without saying, but for avoidance of doubt - your hot sausage rolls, housed in cheerfully grease-soaked paper bags from Greggs and co, are a different conversation altogether.

⁹ Cards on the table once more - my supermarket of choice stocks Scotch eggs in packs of two, so moments later, we go again.

¹⁰ Especially at the frightening pace I've been known to pick up.

such indulgences) that the pork pie technique - leaving them in your shopping bag - simply isn't feasible. Your grabbing arm would be whipping back and forth like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* - it would be exhausting.

So. The solution is to secrete the pack in my jacket pocket. My hand goes from pocket to mouth like a conveyor belt, working through the shrivelled micro-wieners at a rate of knots, until finally the routine is complete. This does, of course, mean that, during the summer months, cocktail sausage consumption is off limits for all but the chilliest of days.

I am well aware that the public can clearly see that I'm eating *something* from my pocket, and that, to many, specifics of the foodstuff are immaterial. My reputation, some would argue, is damaged by sheer fact of my concealing food in clothing. Well, I respectfully disagree. Whether or not you approve of pocket snacking in general, I'd rather maintain the element of mystery as to *what* I'm eating. It could be Maltesers (fine); it could be Monster Munch (embarrassing - though the hierarchy of acceptability for publicly consumed crisps is a whole different matter¹¹). Put simply, I'd rather folks assumed I was eating just about *anything* other than cocktail sausages. That is the beauty of the simple pocket.

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Why go through the rigmarole of eating processed pork snacks on the street at all? Well, what else am I going to do, eat them at home? Not a chance. I will ensure that every last morsel is gone by the time I reach my door, because I do not wish to be caught eating such things within the house I share with my girlfriend. I could not tell you why - perhaps she'd (quite rightly) mock my greed, but that would be it. The consequences would be minor, and well earned. But I can't bring myself to cross that line.

Instead, I must adapt to a life on the streets, eating hog in the urban jungle. I have adjusted my eating speeds to ensure that the entirety of today's treat is gone by the time my key hits the lock. This might mean overshooting my road to utilise a public bin, so as to ensure no incriminating evidence finds its way to my home. It might mean stuffing into my mouth an uncomfortably large chunk of pig 'n' pastry, drier than dust as it is, and hurriedly chewing as I round that last corner.

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<sup>11</sup> Briefly - Kettle chips and Walkers sensations - as classy as crisps come - are right there at the top; Doritos, Monster Munch, and other finger staining and/or novelty wares way down the bottom.

By any means necessary, I shall keep my pork life and my home life separate.

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I want to change, of course I do. I have recently turned 30, an age by which any man should have conquered his processed pork addiction. But I see no way out of it. I spent my thirtieth birthday not at a restaurant, nor a countryside getaway, but in my own kitchen, up to my knuckles in de-skinned sausages, making my own Scotch eggs.



I told myself *this, perhaps, is the solution*. If I ban myself from the consumption of any swine products save for those I've made with my own hands, then at the very least I'll be adding a constructive, wholesome element to the process. I'm eating a boiled egg encased in deep fried pig, sure - but who do you think did the encasing?

But I just don't think it's feasible. The Scotch was delicious, sure - far better an eating experience than those from my local processed pork emporium. The man hours, though, and the price points - they just don't fess up. Short of finally committing to a vegetarian diet, converting to a restrictive religion, or the criminalisation of all such irresistible items, for me every year is the Year Of The Pig.

