

Brain Freeze

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It used to be simple, as I recall. Shopping for the basic necessities—shampoo, deodorant, and lotion, for example—took all of five minutes. Ten, if I got behind somebody who wheeled a month's worth of groceries into the express lane.

But sometime during the past several years, something changed, like a small quaint beach town that—seemingly overnight—suddenly sprouted rows of massive high-rise condos. It happened slowly and craftily, until suddenly a journey to the store has become a major chore. It's something I put off until the toilet paper rolls are empty and the dog is out of food. Something I dread with the equivalency of cleaning shower door tracks or dusting ceiling fan blades. Not because shopping is a particularly gross or physically challenging task, but because there are way too many choices. It causes my brain to freeze up.

Last week, as I stood dazed and numb in the personal hygiene aisle, I was approached by an off-duty paramedic who thought my blood sugar might be low. Eyes glazed over, I told him I was fine. Well, not totally fine, I said. I was unable to make a decision. When had toothpaste commanded half an entire aisle, floor to shoulder height, at Wal-Mart? How does one figure out which benefit is more important: a paste that promises to whiten teeth, prevent tartar buildup, harden enamel, or remove stains? My granny never used anything except baking soda on her pearly whites and she had a beautiful smile.

The good Samaritan stood there, nodding, unable to answer my questions. I demanded to know why there were more than twenty varieties of pre-brush rinses, post-brush rinses and mouthwashes? And furthermore, I wondered, did I really need to buy mouthwash if I was brushing and flossing twice a day? Might the invention of mouthwash and a variety of oral rinses simply be a waste of both money and environment-polluting plastic bottles? Palms up and out in a surrender gesture, the paramedic slowly backed away, telling me to have a nice day.

He disappeared before I had a chance to ask him about the vibration revolution. Not that I have anything against vibrating small appliances, but *come on*. My dental hygienist talked me into a toothbrush that vibrates. My sister sent me a nifty pair of exfoliating gloves that vibrate. Using a one dollar coupon during the double coupon days at Kroger, I bought a Gillette Fusion razor, only to discover that *it* vibrates. (The two dollars I saved might just pay for the next battery.)

I can only imagine what the hotel bellhop thought last weekend, when he plopped my laptop down on top of my overnight bag and something started vibrating with the unobtrusiveness of a jackhammer. Probably my razor, I said. He stood there with a perplexed expression, as though he was trying to solve the problem of global warming, until a manager appeared to ask what the problem was.

"No problem," I said, wheeling away the cart myself. "I think his blood sugar might be low."

I have a suggestion for Gillette, Procter & Gamble, Kraft Foods, Maybelline and all the other consumer product manufacturers out there. Can't you trim down the offerings just a tad? When you added sunscreen to moisturizers and makeup, that was pretty smart. But now you've made your goods glow, tighten, diffuse light, lift, firm and tone. You've put things in there that belong in my stomach: vitamins, seaweed, caffeine and herbs. Should raspberry extract really be spread beneath my eyes instead of on my toast?

You're even messing around with soap, for crying out loud. Mild fragrance is nice—no complaints there. But ground up walnut shells, oyster extract and moisture beads? What is inside of those silly little beads, anyway? Even my old standby, Dove bar soap, now comes in varieties. Unable to decide between the white, green tea, pink moisturizing, or gold energy glow, I impulsively grabbed the first competitive brand I saw. Getting home, I realized it was a nighttime calming formula of lavender and coconut. I couldn't get to sleep because my dog wouldn't stop licking me.

If by chance you've read *Sweet Home Carolina*, you might recall the small town of Rumton and its one general store. The main character, Jaxie Parker went shopping for shampoo, only to find two choices: dandruff control or regular. And they were on the same aisle as the cold beer and worms. Now that's my kind of store.

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