

Beware of 'foodie call' whore dates who are just in it for a free meal

By [Christian Gollayan](#)

| [Updated](#)

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Olivia Balsinger samples the tasty bites at Roof at Park South. Zandy Mangold

When Olivia Balsinger first moved to New York after graduating college in 2014, she wanted to experience Manhattan "Sex and the City"-style. Like many millennials working in entry-level office gigs, however, she was limited by a shoestring budget.

"I was in a job that barely paid my rent," Balsinger, now 24 and living in the East Village, tells The Post.

Going to nice restaurants was out of the question. "I barely had enough money to go to a nice grocery store," she says.

Rather than scrape by on bargain rice and beans, Balsinger decided to seriously try a friend's humorous suggestion: Meet guys on Tinder for the sole purpose of scoring free meals.

Soon, Balsinger was meeting men up to twice a week for nourishment-driven dates at pricey bars and restaurants, such as the [Roof at Park South](#) in Kips Bay.

"You want to enjoy the city, but you don't really want to waste two hours of your paycheck on eating out," she says. "So it's pretty easy to kind of just say yes if someone's offering to take you out."

She recalls one evening when a 30-something European man squired her to celeb-studded seafood spot Catch in the Meatpacking District, where dishes such as truffle sashimi cost \$29.

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Balsinger admits she had zero attraction to her date. She chose him merely because he seemed successful and "lonely," two factors suggesting he'd be happy to pay for her company.

"I can only imagine what the cost was — probably, like, a month of pay from my job," she says of the five-course meal she savored that night.

When the bill came, she coyly fumbled for her clutch in a feigned attempt to pay for her half of the meal. As expected, her date swept in and took care of the tab.

It's a good thing. "If I had been forced to pay, I probably wouldn't have been able to eat for weeks afterward," Balsinger says.

She and her date never saw each other again.

With the rise of dating apps, it's never been easier to order up a foodie call. According to millennial survey app [Wing](#), in a survey exclusive to The Post, 44 percent of young women have swiped right on a date "because why not; it's a free meal" — even if they weren't attracted to the person.

For singles stuck with the tab, the economic toll is considerable. On average, New Yorkers shell out \$2,069 a year on dates, [according to a 2016 Match survey](#).

Even celebrities have partaken in the practice.

Yvonne Orji, star of HBO's "Insecure," told the Los Angeles Times in July that she regularly dated for free food before getting her big break.

"I used to do foodie calls. I know it's bad," [she told the paper](#). "A foodie call is when you're not necessarily interested in the guy, but you're also very interested in eating that night — and times are hard."

She was quick to clarify that the transactions were one-sided.

"It's very different from a booty call because it really just ends after dinner," the actress said. Balsinger also follows this practice.



Singles like Andrea, a 35-year-old marketing coordinator and foodie call enthusiast, says her targets understand the deal.

“We both play this game — I act coy, and you woo me and spend money on me,” the Cobble Hill resident, who didn’t want to disclose her last name for professional reasons, tells The Post. “Women make 75 cents to a man’s dollar, and until the wage gap stabilizes, it’s more than fair game for guys to pay.”

Andrea says she goes on up to three foodie calls a week. Her favorite spots are Dream Hotel downtown, as well as [Catch](#).

It’s not just single women going on subsidized dinner dates.

Alex Blynn, a 26-year-old publicist, has gone on dates with gentlemen who seem likely to handle the check.

“There are a lot of places to eat, but my budget doesn’t always allow me to try them,” says Blynn, who lives in Park Slope. “A great way to supplement [my budget] is to go on a first date even if I’m not personally feeling it.”

One man he met at a bar offered to take him to [Porter House](#), an upscale steakhouse in Columbus Circle where a slab of New York strip can set diners back \$60.

“It was very expensive,” Blynn says. “I’m glad I didn’t have to pay for it.”

Enlarge Image

Publicist Alex Blynn (right) says he goes on foodie calls when money is tight.Stefano Giovannini

Blynn's cost-conscious dating habit has occasionally led to something more. In 2015, a guy he met at a club took him to [Little Park](#), a tony restaurant that serves \$25 trout inside the Smyth hotel in Tribeca. Blynn was smitten, and the two were together for almost a year.

Nevertheless, Balsinger, on firmer financial footing as a matchmaker at dating service Tawkify, says she now prefers lower-key dates — and genuinely offers to pay her share of the bill.

That's not to say she regrets her former tactics.

"New York is its own ball game — there is an 'impress' factor that guys think they have to live up to," Balsinger says. "They want to talk to a pretty girl. Girls are offering their time and conversation."

For any singles worried about being used for a meal ticket, Balsinger says to suggest a low-cost date such as hanging out in Central Park — and observing how matches react.

"If [your match] says no to a simple activity, that's a red flag," she says. "Some of my best dates have involved a bottle of wine from Duane Reade."

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"However, **foodie calls** may be acceptable to some suitors, may be explicitly communicated by some, may occur in same or opposite-sex relationships, and may be perpetrated by either men or women."

[Urban Dictionary: foodie call](#)

< [https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=foodie call](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=foodie%20call)

Foodie Call. (noun) A phone **call** aimed at getting one thing and one thing only. Not an invite to to go out for a movie, not just coffee, not a casual or formal get-together, just a plain old-fashioned " bring me food " with no strings attached.