

# Life's little choices cause stress

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## LIVING

Let's face it...today, more than ever before, we Americans lead a stressful life, and its rapid acceleration is alarming to say the least. The American Institute of Stress (yes, there certainly is one — take a look at [www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)) describes stress as America's number one health problem edging out cancer, heart attacks and all other health maladies that we're asked to be wary of daily. The Institute goes on to say that stress is an unavoidable consequence of life. I tend to agree since unless you live like a hermit in the outback, stress is going to be around for many years to come.

So, I suppose the only sensible thing you and I should do is try to alleviate situations that play havoc with our patience, make our blood boil, accelerate our heartbeat or just plain annoy the heck out of us. That's where the quote used in this column comes in — the stress that is associated with too much choice in everything thrown at us today.

Take for instance a simple tube of toothpaste. Remember when you were a child and your mother took you grocery shopping at the local A & P? It was a quick trip as Mom scooted up and down the aisles throwing items into the cart. She stopped in front of the toothpaste, grabbed a red and white box of Colgate, and in a flash, she was on her merry way.

Not so today. A couple of days ago, I needed some toothpaste and it must have taken me fifteen minutes to decide which one to buy — and I'm still not convinced I made the best choice. Aside from the numerous brands being touted as the best, there were those that promised baking soda for cleanliness, mouthwash for fresh breath, antibacterial protection, extra fluoride for fighting cavities, tartar combat, a peroxide whitening agent, sensitivity protection, fennel (for what, I'm not sure),



As I  
see it

Peg DeMarco

propolis and myrrh (ditto), anti-plaque ingredients, and/or bleach for even more whitening. After narrowing down my selection, I then had to decide if I wanted paste, gel, powder, a pump, strips or drops. And if that wasn't enough, I then had to figure out what flavor I wanted — fresh mint, cinnamon, strawberry, lavender mint, citrus breeze, sparkle fun flavor, herbal mint, wintergreen, ginger mint, bubble fruit, etc. If anyone doubts the above or is wondering what bubble fruit toothpaste tastes like, visit [www.drugstore.com](http://www.drugstore.com), but plan on a long stay since there is sixteen pages of toothpaste products to wade through.

The gist of all this is simply that this is just toothpaste! Try and imagine what we're deluged with daily when presented with numerous other choices in everything else that we do. Making a choice is hard work, no matter how miniscule the object of our desire, and what does this extra work do to our already overloaded brains? Yes, it produces more STRESS!

It doesn't stop with health products either. Lately, I'll watch anything on Turner Movie Classics, even ridiculous 1945 corny movies that I've seen numerous times, just so I don't have to sit through commercials and try and decide mentally what choice I'd make if I was put in a certain situation. For instance, I don't need a new car and I realize that car companies have to sell cars, but I'm beginning to go deaf listening to advertisers shout at me asking me to choose their 4x4 over another company's. I long for a silent car commercial with the words "buy me" plastered across the screen.

And then, my friends, there's food. Even wonderful,

marvelous food, the staple of life, has been thrust into the throes of too many choices not to produce agitation on the stress meter. The first pizzeria in America was opened in 1905 by Gennaro Lombardi at 53 1/3 Street in New York City. Gennaro's pizza has certainly come a long way. Today, we put every conceivable condiment on that flat piece of dough known as the pizza pie and we even stuff its crust because we simply can't get enough of that heavenly mozzarella. Ah, but the stress of selecting the toppings nowadays competes with that of choosing a flavor of Baskin Robbins ice cream — nearly impossible!

I have a somewhat simple solution to alleviating stress brought on by too many choices: let's get back to basics. Let's go with the good old standbys and wave goodbye to the "new and improved" versions. For example, the next time you order a pizza, don't even hesitate when they ask you about toppings. Order a plain cheese pizza instead of that pepperoni, sausage, meatball, pineapple, double fried onion one you usually get. And for dessert, order a vanilla cone instead of that triple double chocolate crunch with raspberry sauce ice cream you always smack your lips for. Try it and see what happens to your stress level. Remember how happy you were the first time you sank your teeth into that cheese pizza as a kid or licked the vanilla ice cream from the side of your sugar cone? It was heaven, wasn't it? And when you were finished, you were satisfied rather than left wondering if you made the right choice or not.

And the toothpaste? See if they have plain, old, unadulterated Colgate. I have a feeling it's somewhere in the back of the grocery shelf and that it probably will do a super job on your teeth just as long as you brush them.

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for The News Herald.