



# Have You Heard?

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### Shopping Mania

Shopping has become an almost universal activity in America-- a necessary pursuit in a modern society. It is also a form of entertainment, a generally harmless pastime, except for those people who let it get out of hand. In this age of easy credit, most of us know someone who shops and spends compulsively. Personal bankruptcy increased 462% between 1950 and 1975, and according to a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine*, one in 12 Americans is overwhelmed by debt.

The compulsive shopper, unlike the person who makes occasional impulse purchases, is driven to consume and cannot control the urge to buy even when his habit disrupts his life. Because the phenomenon is so widespread, scientific researchers have begun to investigate compulsive shopping. Researchers at the University of Southern California recently studied 133 people (ranging in age from 18 to 89) and found that about one-third of them regularly experienced what they called an irresistible compulsion to buy. Other preliminary work with compulsive shoppers conducted at the University of Minnesota indicated that compulsive shopping is often a reaction to stress or depression. In one survey over 40% of those who defined themselves as compulsive shoppers said they were most likely to buy something when "feeling bad" about themselves. About the same number of people also admitted that their closets were filled with unopened items.

According to the study done at the University of Southern California, compulsive shopping is not confined to women. Anyone can succumb. In some cases shopping can become an addiction like gambling. One warning sign is continued spending in the face of financial difficulties and mounting debt. The compulsive shopper can take some constructive actions on his own. Keeping a diary of purchases may help, and so may putting a distance between impulse and action. For example, keeping credit cards in a safe deposit box might break a pattern for some people. Trying to analyze the motives for compulsive shopping may also help. If unhappiness is the cause, there are more effective remedies than shopping. A support group may help. Check your phone book for a local chapter of Debtors Anonymous (modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous). The National Foundation for Consumer Credit (301-589-5600) can suggest credit counseling services.

### The Bugs Bunny Diet

"Are carrots really good for your eyes?" asks the straight man in the old joke. Answer: "Did you ever see a rabbit wearing glasses? Carrots are definitely good for your eyes, since they are the world's richest source of beta carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A, a crucial nutrient for the health of the retina. Besides that, beta carotene, an antioxidant, is also believed to be a protector

against cancer. And carrots may also help lower blood cholesterol. Carrots are a smart way to get your beta carotene and vitamin A.

Fully formed vitamin A occurs only in animal products such as liver, butter, whole milk, cheese, and egg yolk, where it comes packed with a fair amount of saturated fat and cholesterol. Some people respond to this news by turning to vitamin supplements, but these may be dangerous. Megadoses of preformed vitamin A are toxic. Even doses as low as seven times the Recommended Dietary Allowance can produce adverse reactions in some people-- fatigue, insomnia, and weight loss. But beta carotene is essentially nontoxic. Even in huge doses, all it can do is give your skin a yellowish tinge. The body regulates the conversion of beta carotene to vitamin A so

there is never too much of it. For that reason, several large vitamin manufacturers are planning to replace vitamin A with beta carotene in their supplements.

But you are still better off with carrots than pills. Just one three-ounce carrot has enough beta carotene to supply your body with five times the vitamin A it needs daily. A carrot also contains one to

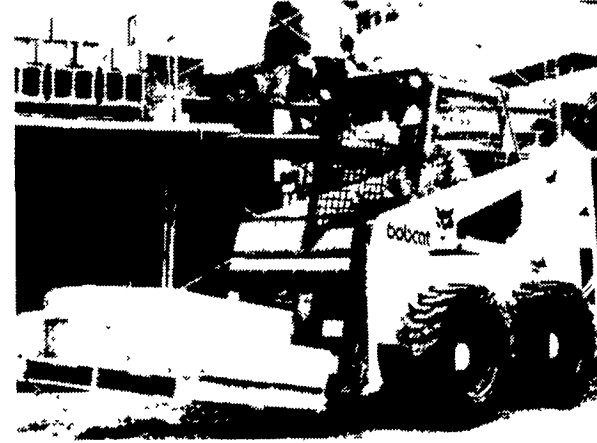
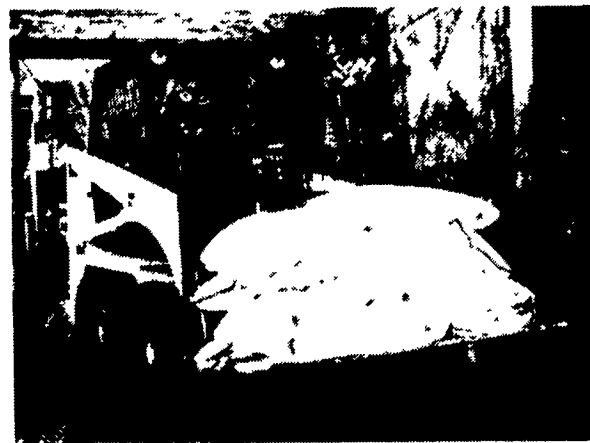
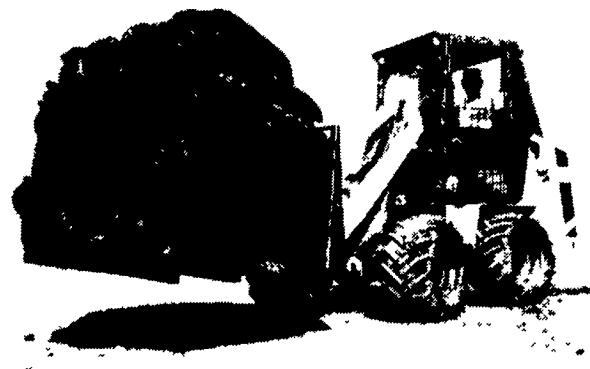
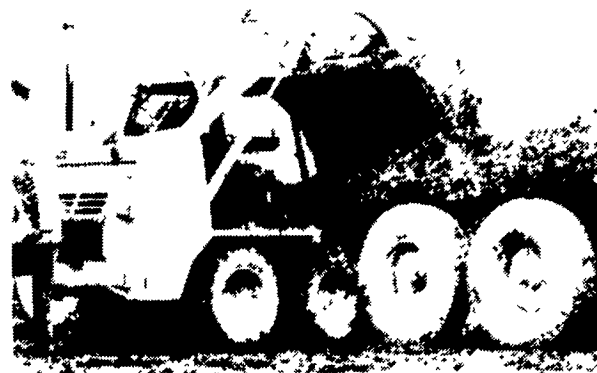
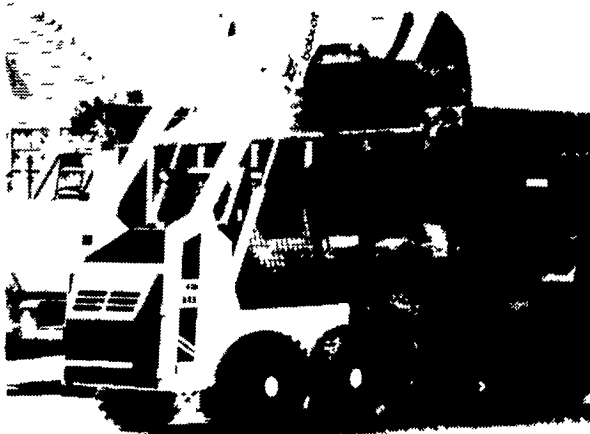
two grams of dietary fiber. Carrots are among the sweetest tasting vegetables, yet that three-ounce carrot has only 25 calories.

A word of caution about the rabbits-and-glasses joke: vitamin A will not cure nearsightedness or farsightedness and can improve vision only if vision problems result from a vitamin A deficiency, which is a rare condition in this country.

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