

Restaurant nutrition. Sandwich with veggie saute is the best pick.

By Jill Sherman Skeem

Weight gain from the holiday season seems to be a common complaint, making January the biggest month for the diet and fitness industry. Remember: Diets do not work, but making healthier choices does.

With Americans eating out more than ever and childhood obesity on the rise, the choices we make are not just for ourselves but for our children. So instead of ordering from the kids' menu -- which usually consists of hot dogs and fries, chicken fingers and fries, burgers and fries, pizza or mac 'n cheese -- why not order a healthier entree from the adult menu? Either split it with them or among your children.

Feeding our children the same foods at every meal only increases their desire to eat those foods, and the preference will continue into adulthood.

Instead, think about the foods you choose to nourish yourself and your family every day and see if there are better choices you can make. Perhaps this will be the year you get healthier!

These suggestions regarding *Times-News* reporters' featured lunches should help you make healthier choices the next time you dine out:

Chili burger

Matt Christensen, I can't believe you ate the whole thing! Haven't I seen this on an Alka-Seltzer commercial? When I first saw this chili burger I was not sure what it was, so I hope the man who ordered it solely on presentation was a happy camper when he finished.

But how could you go wrong with beef, cheese, chili, bread, beans, salsa and lettuce to help cool things off?

This is the type of meal we crave in the winter. Eating longer-cooked and heartier dishes such as stews, chili or burgers keeps our internal body temperature warm to help us survive cold weather.

It is not natural to crave a big, cold salad this time of year. So, Matt, at least your body is on the right track. However, downing three cups of coffee during this meal could cause you to wash down this behemoth burger instead of chewing it well. Are you taking a page out of Steve Crump's playbook?

All I can say is, Matt, good thing you are still young!

Teriyaki burger

Steve, I think you would be surprised that I agree with you about your choice of onion rings.

Like tempura, the batter actually steams the onion, and deep-frying uses less oil than sauteing when done properly. We all need good-quality oil in our diet, because it helps produce our hormones and keeps us active. Deep-frying from time to time is a great way to get that oil. Not only is it very satisfying, but it provides good energy for physical and mental work such as writing weekly columns.

It is always better to make your own onion rings or tempura because you can control the oil that is used. Some restaurants still use oil that contains trans fatty acids. These acids are synthetic saturated fats known to contribute to cardiovascular disease and are linked to inflammation, diabetes, obesity, hypertension and even cancer.

Teriyaki sauce, original or not, can be very salty and leave you craving sweets, although the sweetness from the pineapple could help balance the salt. Instead of dipping the onion rings in ketchup or fry sauce, I would recommend the teriyaki sauce. The salt in the sauce will aid in the digestion of the oil in the onion rings.

Club sandwich and chili soup

Matt, since you are not a mayonnaise lover, you can substitute another condiment such as mustard for your club sandwich. It would be a healthier alternative because it does not contain saturated fat.

If there is an option regarding the bread for your sandwich, whole-wheat or whole-grain are always better than white bread because of the fiber they contain. Another way to improve this sandwich would be to leave off the bacon, but then it would be just a triple-decker turkey sandwich.

Soup normally is a good choice as a starter or side dish because it aids with digestion, and with this sandwich you would need all the help you can get. An easy way to lighten up a soup is to refuse the cheese garnish and stick with broth-based soups. Matt, I think with the size of this sandwich, you were lucky the soup was on the lighter side.

Trout fillets

Virginia Hutchins, you must be reading my columns! Requesting a salad instead of fries is always a better choice, although I agree that this salad was far from green.

Without a vinaigrette option, most restaurants do have oil and vinegar available as a dressing. I can understand why you did not like the fat-free dressing. Fat-free options contain so many chemicals and additives that they no longer taste like food.

I am a true believer in eating real food over fat-free, low-fat food. Your body knows how to utilize milk, cream, eggs, sugar, etc. (the contents of ice cream) but has no idea what to do with the chemicals and preservatives listed in so-called "healthy" foods. Real food will satisfy you, and you will eat less than you would of the "healthy" alternative.

Virginia, you were correct about one trout fillet being a good portion size. A side dish of rice or even a whole-grain roll would have helped balance the fish and fill you up. Then you could have taken the second fillet home for another meal.

Remember, lemon wedges are not just a garnish for fish. Lemon juice aids in the digestion of the fish and the oil. So squeeze a little bit on each piece.

Chicken sandwich

Virginia, substituting sauteed vegetables for fries was a much healthier option for this meal. Vegetables sauteed in oil is a great way to get oil into our diet and give us quick energy. When we deny ourselves fat, we eventually crave it and then eat bad fats such as potato chips, pizza or chocolate to satisfy the craving.

I noticed this sandwich came with mayo, so again choosing a healthier condiment such as mustard would have been a better option.

I think this meal was the most balanced and therefore the best pick of the bunch. The Snake River Grill, like most restaurants, is very accommodating about making substitutions. So don't be bashful, and request healthier choices when you dine out this year.

Now if only Steve and Matt would do the same!

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