

Eat Cheap Winter Series – 1-16-09

Winter is when we crave warm, hearty dishes. They help our bodies adjust and stay warm in the cold weather. With the new year many people are eating healthier, but unfortunately they're eating the wrong things - like salad and raw vegetables. It is hard to feel satisfied and not crave a hamburger and fries when you eat foods that cool you off instead of warm you up. This is one reason many people fail to keep their New Year's resolutions. It has less to do with willpower than with your body's need for foods to help it survive cold weather.

Ordering and eating hearty, healthy and satisfying meals can be done. Let's see how well the *Times-News* reporters ordered to help them combat winter.

Chow Mein with Sweet and Sour Pork

Andrew Weeks, ordering off the menu instead of the buffet was a great move, because many people overeat at a buffet to get their money's worth.

I grew up eating a lot of Chinese food, and sweet and sour pork was my mom's favorite dish. So I grew up looking at that glow-in-the-dark red sauce and wondering what made it glow. Well, I found outit's ketchup! Unfortunately, it also contains a lot of sugar, which is probably why so many people enjoy this dish. The sweet and savory flavors are a very popular combination. Pork is the other white meat, so choosing it as your main protein was a good choice; however, ordering it with a lighter sauce would have been better.

Andrew, I did like that this dish came with a side of veggies - although, I have never seen veggies garnished with ham slices before. You never mentioned whether you ate those. I hope not.

People often think all Chinese dishes are healthy, but you have to be careful of the deep-fried dishes and heavy sauces. When dining at a Chinese restaurant it is easy to order dishes with veggies that are still crunchy and delicious. Why not change it up a bit and order tofu as your main protein? Or try a sautéed vegetable- and- noodle dish such as vegetable lo mein. Even if a dish is not on the menu, restaurants are usually accommodating and will make substitutions. These dishes are still satisfying.

Mandarin House offers a variety of entrees where the chicken, pork or meat is more of an accent. This reduces the saturated fat and cholesterol, and plenty of veggies balance the protein and add fiber and nutrients.

Tomato Bisque and Roll

Ariel Hansen, you are right: Soups and stews are a great way to warm our core on a cold winter day. And what could be more warming than a big bowl of Golden Elk's homemade tomato bisque?

A bowl of soup will stick to your ribs better than a salad. I don't think I have ever heard anyone come in from shoveling, skiing or working in the snow and ask for a big bowl of salad! Just because we can fly lettuce into our grocery stores from warm climates doesn't mean we should be eating it this time of year. To eat what is in season is an important part of being healthy and living comfortably in our local climate.

Golden Elk offers some delicious sandwiches and panini - grilled sandwiches with olive oil and Italian seasonings - so other than half a panino, a warm, crusty roll was the perfect complement to the soup. Ariel, using only half the butter pat was better than slathering the whole thing on your roll. One of the easiest ways to cut calories and saturated fat is to ignore the butter altogether and dip your roll in the soup.

Bean Tostada

Melissa Davlin, I think this lunch not only heated you up, but helped you discover the power of food. Hot peppers and chilies do increase the body's circulation and heat, while sour cream cools it off. This is the reason many spicy ethnic dishes, such as with Indian food, are served with yogurt sauce and Mexican food with sour cream. So, instead of frowning on your use of sour cream, I commend you for using it to help you put out the fire. El Cazador's homemade guacamole should have helped, too.

And yes, fat does help us stay warm in the winter months and gives us energy. In addition to the sour cream, I think the deep-fried tortilla helped with that, too. The crispy, fried tortilla is hard to resist and this would not be a tostada without it, but you could have ordered the tostada in a bowl or on a plate.

El Cazador makes its refried beans the traditional way – with lard - and unfortunately does not offer a healthier bean option. It does offer many vegetarian entrees, such as vegetable burritos, enchiladas, quesadillas, and fajitas, which would have been healthier lunch choices. However, if you are a vegetarian, I must warn you that the rice and bean side dishes served with these entrees are not vegetarian.

Melissa, it probably was a good thing you waited a few minutes before you braved the elements – otherwise, you might have looked like a big ball of steam walking to your car!

Thai Peanut Wrap

Chad Newby and his wife bought New York Burrito on Sept. 1 and have made some healthier changes to its menu. The change I am most excited about is the brown rice option. Brown rice has seven times the nutrients of white rice, so whenever it is on a menu, it is the one to choose. In addition, it contains much more fiber – a necessary but neglected element in the standard American diet – than white rice. New York Burrito is now the third restaurant I know of in Twin Falls to offer brown rice; hopefully, it is becoming a trend.

Since the rice and bean options are all vegetarian, it is easy for anyone to dine here. The best part is you can choose what items you want on your burrito. And if you are worried about eating too many carbs, New York Burrito offers an “unwrapped” burrito: all the same toppings served on a bed of lettuce instead of in a wrap. And speaking of wraps, the wheat and tomato- basil tortillas are preservative free, but the Newweys hope all of the wraps will be in the future.

With the large burrito, made with a 12- to -13 inch tortilla and weighing in at a pound or more, and the mini-burrito made with a 10 - inch tortilla, New York Burrito handles all appetite sizes. I was told many people buy a large burrito so they can have enough for a second meal.

Virginia Hutchins, you made all the right choices for your burrito. Even though it was probably a bit protein- heavy with the chicken and beans, it definitely sounded like it hit the spot on a cold, wintry day. It was hard to pick just one healthy lunch because they all had great aspects. However, I liked that this lunch was loaded with fiber, complex carbohydrates and healthy protein, which is why I’m choosing this as the healthiest of the bunch.

New York Burrito appeals to all kinds – vegetarians, low-carbers and big eaters – so it’s a wrap.