

Restaurant Nutrition
Jill Skeem

Gooding soup is the best of this hospital grub

My father was a doctor and would take my sisters and me to eat at the hospital cafeteria when I was growing up. We always thought it was a treat because we got to use cafeteria trays, and I remember thinking the fried chicken was delicious.

Hospital cafeterias are known for being very reasonably priced, and you don't have to be an employee or a visitor to eat there. I couldn't wait to see what the Times-News reporters ordered and how the food has changed since I was a child.

Reuben sandwich with Brussels sprouts

Andrew Weeks, the Reuben sandwich used to be my favorite. I loved the grilled bread and creamy Swiss cheese as well as the sweet-and-sour combination of the Russian dressing and sauerkraut. However, with high sodium in the corned beef, Swiss and sauerkraut, I drank water the rest of the day. This sandwich is delicious but does contain a lot of saturated fat and cholesterol, even with the processed cheese. Not the healthiest of choices.

Wow, Andrew! Brussels sprouts? Who would have thought? Brussels sprouts are a member of the cabbage family and loaded with fiber and vitamin C. Many people use a cheese or a sauce to disguise the vegetables. Of course, leaving off the cheesy sauce helps reduce the saturated fat and cholesterol on this side dish, but the fiber and vitamins you receive from the vegetables outweigh the sauce on them.

Andrew, perhaps Cassia Regional Medical Center's healthy lifestyle lecture during your lunch was fortuitous.

Southwest chicken salad

Virginia Hutchins, it is hard to eat a salad this time of year because it cools the body instead of warming it up. I can understand your desire for warm chicken. It would have helped bring out the chicken's flavor and would have been a nice contrast to the cool greens and veggies. I like that St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center will be making that menu change.

I also like that it makes its own salad dressing. Dressing is so easy to make, and it saves you money and avoids chemicals and preservatives.

Virginia, it takes three to four oranges to make an 8-ounce glass of orange juice, and often restaurants use a concentrate which normally contains sugar or high-fructose corn syrup. I would have preferred you had eaten a whole orange instead. When you juice fruit, you lose out on the benefits of the fruit's fiber. Juice is also more concentrated and turns into sugar more quickly.

Grilled cheese sandwich and fries

Melissa Davlin, in this cold weather, no meal is better comfort food than grilled cheese and french fries. This was not the healthiest lunch but definitely sounds yummy. I like that Minidoka Memorial Hospital's sandwiches are cooked to order and that you ordered whole-wheat bread instead of white. That improves this lunch a bit. And the ketchup — believe it or not, according to the USDA, it's a vegetable — did add a nice contrasting red to your otherwise beige plate.

Melissa, with your newfound fortune, you could have ordered a soup, a vegetable side dish, a piece of fruit or a salad — but soda? A 12-ounce soda contains 10 teaspoons of sugar, which, if you haven't had it in a while, can be sickeningly sweet. How thoughtful of you to give it to your husband. I hope he enjoyed it.

French dip and Italian pasta salad

Ariel Hansen, have you been reading my articles? Ordering your French dip sandwich without Swiss cheese is a great way to reduce the saturated fat and calories, especially as the pasta salad contained cheese.

I am pleased St. Luke's Wood River Medical Center's jus wasn't too salty, because it can cause you to drink too much or crave sweets — although the jus might explain why you wanted your unsweetened ice tea mixed with pink lemonade. Ariel, this is a great way to not drink an entire glass of pink lemonade, which is loaded with either sugar or high-fructose corn syrup.

Ham and potatoes

Virginia, it's hard to believe you can get a meal like this for \$4. Ham tends to be salty, so serving it with a raisin sauce is a great way to balance the flavors. It looked as if the piece of ham did have some fat on the outside of the slice which adds to its flavor. I hope you trimmed off the excess fat to reduce the saturated fat and cholesterol in this meal.

In St. Benedicts Family Medical Center's defense, it is hard to keep veggies firm when you prepare them ahead of time and try to keep them warm. But mushy veggies are better than no veggies. Too bad the red-bliss potatoes had little flavor, because they looked delicious. In addition to the raisin sauce, potatoes balance out the saltiness of the ham.

I liked this lunch because it had veggies and potatoes and was a good choice for this cold weather. I would have liked to have seen a grain complete this meal, but you can't have everything.

Pork and barley soup

Andrew, it's a shame you had only one hot meal choice — but what a choice. Nothing warms you on a cold day better than a hearty soup. Beef and barley is a more traditional soup combination, but pork is a leaner protein. Using the beef or the pork in soup gives the soup flavor and makes the meat more of an accent to the meal.

People often ask me how they can get more whole grains into their diets, and adding barley or other whole grains to a soup is a great way. Barley is one of the oldest grains and is loaded with vitamins and nutrients and, more importantly, fiber. With the barley, pork and veggies, this soup sounded hearty enough to give you strength for the rest of the day.

Nothing complements a big bowl of soup better than a freshly made dinner roll or two.. It sounds like Gooding County Memorial Hospital has a secret weapon with its Eula roll — well worth the seconds. I liked this lunch because it had whole grains, lean protein and veggies. It was the most balanced lunch of the bunch, so I'm choosing it as the healthiest.

Jill Skeem is a certified macrobiotic health counselor and graduated from the Strengthening Health Institute in Philadelphia. She can be reached at 208-320-2786, or visit her Web site at www.backtorealfood.com.