

Eat cheap -- breakfast

We roused ourselves early and shook off our sleepiness.

The three Eat Cheap reporters made the rounds of Twin Falls' open-early eateries to seek out breakfast options that won't start your day in the red. The budget: \$7, not including tax or tip.

As much as we like newspapers over breakfast — after all, they take the awkwardness out of dining alone at any time of day — we didn't discriminate against restaurants that fail to provide them.

As usual, we asked Jill Sherman Skeem, a local health counselor, to evaluate our meal choices too.

Buffalo Café

Bacon and eggs

Price: \$6.50

The Buffalo Cafe claims to serve the best breakfast in town.

I think they're right.

The cafe features a hefty morning menu with several specialty items, and the restaurant is well-known for its enormous pancakes.

I've eaten at the Buffalo many times (it's just down the street from the newsroom), and I'm never disappointed. It's clear they can make a mean specialty omelet, but can they do the same with the basics?

I decided to find out. I ordered my favorite breakfast meal: bacon and eggs, sunny side up, with wheat toast and hash browns.

Once again, I wasn't disappointed. My meal was ready within five minutes of ordering — even though every table in the restaurant was full — and it was excellent. I sprinkled a dash of pepper over my eggs, broke open the yoke and dipped a corner of toast. Perfect.

The eggs were soft but not runny. The bacon was fantastic, too. Thick and meaty with not much soft fat. The potatoes were so-so — a little greasy for my taste.

I saved a slice of toast for dessert. The Buffalo makes jam right there in the kitchen, and my favorite is blackberry. So good.

Maybe I'll start getting up a few minutes earlier from now on. I'd sacrifice sleep for a Buffalo breakfast any day.

— Matt Christensen

Java

Huevos Rancheros

Price: \$6.95

Even if you forgo the espresso, breakfast at Java will wake you up. Two walls of bare windows in the boldly colored Twin Falls coffee shop face south and east, showcasing the sunrise. But close your eyes to bathe in the light; the windows look out on asphalt and distant weeds.

My favorite Java breakfast is the Huevos Rancheros: scrambled eggs on a daunting mound of black beans, with modest sprinklings of green onions and shredded cheese. A few small slices of fruit and two flour tortillas are served on the side; if I had thought of it I would have asked for substitution of wheat toast. I did request an extra portion of the tasty fresh salsa in lieu of sour cream; there's no "extra salsa" button on the register, so I had to ask again after my breakfast was served.

No problem. It's a casual sort of place.

On that morning, the Java counter served a stream of coffee customers; a family with little kids shared oatmeal; adult friends pushed a couple of tables together for a confab; and half a dozen solo readers sipped and nibbled over newspapers.

Nobody will notice if you can't finish your beans.

— Virginia S. Hutchins

Moxie Java

Panini and orange juice

Price: \$6.95

Show up for breakfast at Moxie Java Tuscany, and you'll have to avert your eyes from the pastry case. Go for the breakfast panini instead. It scores higher on the nutrition scale than mocha and a cinnamon roll, and it's plenty tasty.

Scrambled eggs, roasted red bell peppers, green onions, melted cheese and your choice of bacon, ham or sausage (I chose ham) are grilled inside a flour tortilla and served with salsa (bottled, not fresh), sour cream (I didn't touch it) and a slice of cantaloupe (large-ish). The coffee shop — a deliberately tasteful retreat on Twin Falls' Blue Lakes Boulevard North — was out of whole wheat tortillas the morning I ordered a panini, so mine came inside the standard pale version.

Though the breakfast rang up at \$5.20 — not the \$4.95 on the menu — the Eat Cheap budget still allowed for an 8-ounce bottle of unsweetened orange juice (\$1.75).

Light grilling gives the panini a slightly crispy — and not greasy — exterior and keeps the whole thing together. Unlike so many wraps, this one didn't drip sauce on my morning newspaper or fall apart in my hand when I neared the end. Of course, plentiful cheese had something to do with both.

— Virginia S. Hutchins

Diamondfield Jack's Restaurant

French toast

Price: \$6.95

I'd never been to Diamondfield Jack's Restaurant inside the Red Lion Hotel before I had breakfast there earlier this month.

I probably won't be back.

Jack's takes advantage of its location to charge high prices to hotel guests. I think I ended up paying for cloth napkins and crystal glasses, not good food.

The big breakfast — with eggs, bacon, toast and potatoes — costs more than \$10. With a \$7 cap, I was limited to French toast or pancakes and little else.

I opted for French toast. I'm not usually one for sweet breakfasts, but my meal turned out OK. Cinnamon and powdered sugar were sprinkled over three pieces of toast. I drizzled a few tablespoons of maple syrup over the bread and dug in.

Pretty tasty, but nothing special.

The service, though, was excellent. I never saw the bottom of my coffee cup.

Too bad prices aren't more reasonable. The Denver omelet looked pretty good at a table nearby.

— Matt Christensen

Addison West Restaurant

Buckwheat pancakes

Price: \$3.95

I'm not a great fan of pancakes — they always strike me as heavy fare — but at Jill Sherman Skeem's suggestion I sampled the buckwheat pancakes at Addison West Restaurant in Twin Falls.

I was pleasantly surprised. They were light — not fluffy, exactly, but foamy — and the buckwheat flour gave them a distinctive, sweet potato-like taste.

Buckwheat comes from a plant that's no kin to wheat because, unlike wheat, it's not a true grass. It's the descendent of a wild plant that's been used as subsistence food for thousands of years — notably on the American frontier, where it was abundant and converted into a variety of uses.

Addison West is a no-frills place. I got three large pancakes, served up with butter and maple syrup. They were tasty, but too much food for me at that hour (I'm emphatically not a morning person).

Still, it struck me that this particular offering would be a good Sunday brunch choice: hearty but not oppressive, with flavor that doesn't need to be enhanced by too many sweet and fatty condiments.

— Steve Crump

So how nutritious are these breakfasts?

By Jill Sherman Skeem

Breakfast — ahhhhh, the most important meal of the day. Many people say they aren't hungry for breakfast, but often it is because they eat before going to bed. Not eating for three hours before bedtime helps your body digest dinner so it can clean and repair itself at night.

Skipping breakfast is a common factor with many overweight people. Eating three regular meals a day keeps your metabolism active and your blood sugar levels stable.

Going out for breakfast is one of those wonderful weekend pleasures. The question is where to go and how to make healthier choices. Let's see how well the Times-News reporters did.

Buffalo Cafe

Matt Christensen, what did you have on Steve Crump to get the Buffalo Cafe assignment? The Buffalo is an institution in Twin Falls. It has a wonderful rustic atmosphere, and many menu items are homemade.

Matt ordered the typical American breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast and hash browns. Eating two eggs by themselves is a better choice than eating an omelet normally made with three eggs and loaded with cheese and processed meat. It should be noted that Buffalo Cafe offers half portions along with a la carte breakfast items. So, you can enjoy breakfast without having to order a huge portion. Omitting the bacon is one way to cut down on the saturated fat in this meal. Matt, somehow I knew that would not happen on your watch!

But I am proud of you for ordering whole wheat instead of white toast. You must be getting tired of my ribbing. Two slices of whole wheat toast satisfies two-thirds of the USDA's daily fiber requirements.

I can understand why you saved the homemade blackberry jam on toast for dessert. The sweetness helps balance the saltiness of this meal. I am impressed Buffalo Cafe makes its own jam. Anything homemade is better than store-bought.

I think the Buffalo Cafe is a classic and hope it stays around for years to come.

Diamondfield Jack's

Matt, perhaps your budget helped you choose a healthier meal at Diamondfield Jack's than you would have normally.

French toast is bread dipped in egg batter, so the cholesterol is much less than the Denver omelet you were eyeing at the adjacent table. Ordering the French toast without the powdered sugar garnish helps reduce the sweetness of this dish along with using a minimal amount of maple syrup.

Another way to lower the saturated fat in this meal is not to use butter.

I am sorry you were limited by your budget, but perhaps that was a good thing.

Moxie Java Tuscany

Virginia Hutchins, you were right to pass on the mocha and cinnamon roll. Starting the day off with such a sugary breakfast can wreak havoc on your blood sugar all day long.

To make this panini healthier, you could leave out the processed meat, even though ham was the

leanest of the choices. Ham is salty, which can lead to sugar and liquid cravings. Again, not using the sour cream garnish keeps the saturated fat down in this meal.

The slice of cantaloupe was a bit large but a good balance to the salt in this meal. I am impressed Moxie Java carries the Knudsen brand of juice. Knudsen does not add sugar or high-fructose corn syrup to its juices. Many local stores carry this brand.

Virginia, too bad they were out of the whole wheat tortillas — although I give you credit for asking.

It is hard to beat a warm, toasted panini on these cold mornings, and with a few modifications you can keep it healthy.

Java

Virginia, this was a new take on huevos rancheros. I love that the dish has black beans — a great source of fiber and protein. Requesting salsa instead of sour cream was a good choice, too. I am impressed it is homemade.

Whole wheat toast would have been a good substitute for the flour tortillas because of the added fiber. Fiber is so important in the diet because it combines with fats and toxins and moves them quickly out of the body. So whenever possible, order the item with the most fiber.

It looks like one egg was used in this meal and a minimal amount of cheese. The easiest way to reduce the amount of saturated fat in any meal is to forego the cheese and the sour cream. If you are concerned about cholesterol, many restaurants offer dishes made with only egg whites or egg substitutes. If these options are not available and you really want an egg, just order one instead of two.

Virginia, I like the balance and how fresh the meal looked, which is why this dish gets my vote for the healthiest breakfast.

Addison West Restaurant

Steve, I am proud of you for ordering the buckwheat pancakes and am happy you enjoyed them. Could you be changing your ways?

The easiest way to make pancakes healthier is to hold the butter. Requesting real maple syrup over imitation or a low-fat version is better. For those of you with sugar imbalances, brown rice syrup is a great alternative to syrup. It is made from brown rice, a complex carbohydrate, so it breaks down in your body more slowly and doesn't affect your blood sugar as dramatically as sugar or maple syrup. I usually bring a jar with me when we go for pancakes. No one seems to mind. Just try not to forget it on the table.

Many people believe honey is better for you than sugar or syrup. But it's 70 percent sweeter than sugar.

Steve, you are making real headway! Buckwheat today ... perhaps tofu tomorrow!

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