

Restaurant nutrition. Veggie pizza scores highest for 'Eat Cheap' nutrition.

By Jill Sherman Skeem

Veggie pizza scores highest for 'Eat Cheap' nutrition

With 900,000 places to eat in the United States and \$476 billion in projected sales for 2005, more and more Americans agree that restaurants are an essential part of their lifestyles, according to the National Restaurant Association.

But the question remains: How can we dine out and still make healthy choices?

It can be done with a little effort and imagination. Restaurants are very accommodating. If you have a special request, they will often prepare it for you. These suggestions regarding *Times-News* reporters' featured lunches should help you make healthier choices the next time you dine out.

Pizza buffet

Matt Christensen, I think your timing for the pizza buffet saved you from yourself!

Somehow I don't think a chicken-and-veggie pizza would have been your first choice, although I think it was your best choice. Since Americans eat 10 acres of pizza a day, ordering a veggie pizza instead of pepperoni or sausage is a great way to add more vegetables to your life and make pizza a healthier choice.

Also, ordering it light on the cheese or with no cheese at all can help, too. The side salad completed this meal nicely, but passing on the imitation bacon bits and selecting an oil-based dressing would have been better choices.

Matt, I think you redeemed yourself with this lunch. And you made the best choice of all the lunches eaten -- whether you intended to or not.

Club sandwich

Steve Crump, after seeing the size of this sandwich, I am proud of you for not finishing it and for passing on the french fries. However, I am not sure whether it was because you were full or because your survival instinct kicked in.

To make this sandwich healthier, start by taking a friend or two next time and sharing it with them.

You mentioned that you had a choice of bread, so requesting whole wheat would have been a good one. At least you would be complying with one USDA food guideline, eating 3 ounces of whole grains a day -- the equivalent of three slices of whole-wheat bread.

You also mentioned that a garnish of either mustard or mayo would be needed the next time you try to tackle this "big boy." Mustard would be the better choice. There is no sense adding more saturated fat to this sandwich.

The amount of processed meat and cheese in this meal can leave you feeling very thirsty, bloated and craving sweets for the rest of the day.

Souvlaki and salad

Virginia Hutchins, the turkey souvlaki does look succulent and well-trimmed, although the portion size of protein is probably double the amount that is recommended at one meal. It should be the size of the palm of your hand. Marinating lean cuts of meat is a great way to make them more tender and tasty.

Since you mentioned that nearly everything was a la carte, a side of vegetables and/or a rice dish would have been a great way to complete this meal -- if those options had been available.

Ordering your salad with more veggies on it, without the cheese and with an oil-based dressing would have improved this side salad. Even if there aren't other vegetables on the menu, it doesn't hurt to ask.

It is just a hunch, but I am beginning to think Idahoans have an aversion to oil-based dressings. They are lower in saturated fat and can be quite delicious, so give them a try next time.

Sweet and sour chicken

Matt, your instinct to choose the soup over the salad was a good one. With the weather getting colder, it is important that we eat foods that will warm us up, and soup is a great one for that. Salad really should be eaten more in the summer months because it cools us off.

This is the time of year to add more oil into our diets. However, between the King Kong-size egg roll and the pork fried rice, I think this lunch had a bit too much oil. Fried rice is a yummy dish this time of year, but to make it healthier, vegetable fried rice would have been a better choice -- especially since your meal already consisted of three chicken dishes.

Asking whether the restaurant has a vegetarian egg roll or spring roll is another way to make a meal healthier.

People always seem to love the sweet and sour chicken or pork -- my mother included -- but what makes that red sauce glow in the dark? I have observed this dish frequently in my life, and it is still a mystery! Just a thought: When ordering a dish it is important to inquire about the ingredients in a sauce. Many can contain hidden cream, sugar and/or butter.

When a meal is heavy on the protein or too salty, sweets are always craved -- which is probably why the coconut pudding tasted so good.

Matt, balance your meal with more vegetables next time!

Chicken taco and enchilada

Virginia, Mexican food is always yummy. And the hot-and-spicy food creates circulation in the body and helps clear out our sinuses, which is a good thing this time of year.

This lunch could use more vegetables in addition to the lettuce and tomato garnish. Next time you go there, instead of ordering two chicken enchiladas, try ordering one chicken and one veggie. Even if it is not on the menu, ask whether they can make one for you.

This will give you a good excuse to go back and eat there, although I am sure you don't need one. El Sombrero isn't crowded for nothing.

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