

Eat Cheap Series – (Mini-Cassia Area)

With summer upon us, it's natural to crave and eat more salads and fruits. This helps our body adapt to the climate change. For this Eat Cheap Installment in Mini-Cassia, Virginia Hutchins, the Features Editor, gave Matt Christensen and Steve Crump clear instructions not only to eat delicious food but to make healthier choices so they can receive praise instead of criticism from me. Now where is the fun in that! Let's see how they did.

Wild Flour Café:

Virginia, I give you kudos for ordering a vegetable Panini at Wild Flour Cafe. Panini means grilled bread in Italian. When ordered with Italian meats and/or cold cuts, it is loaded with saturated fat, sodium and sugar. Inquiring into the type of oil used for the vegetable sauté would have been a good question, but other than that the panini you ordered looked yummy. Grilled bread is always delicious and satisfying. I am impressed that their red pepper sauce was homemade. Anything homemade is much healthier than its boxed or bottled version which normally contains chemical preservatives and additives.

The chicken soup broth did look fatty, so the fact that it contained mostly veggies was its redeeming quality. Much of the broth's surface fat can be eliminated by scooping it off with a spoon. Ordering a green salad instead of this soup would have made this lunch lighter, but on the whole, Virginia, you made a good choice.

Alaska's Best:

After my 10 years living in New England, Alaska's Best sounds like home to me. Nothing is better than fresh seafood, and wild halibut was a great choice. Wild fish, especially freshwater or ocean fish, is healthier because it is usually eaten within 2 or 3 days of the catch. In addition, it lacks added hormones, coloring agents, antibiotics and/or preservatives.

White-meat fish is less fatty than either red-meat or blue –skinned varieties so I am glad halibut was an option.

Ordering it grilled is a great way to minimize saturated fat, and the 5-ounce order is a perfect amount of protein for a meal. I hope you squeezed a bit of lemon juice on the fish, as it helps the body digest it better.

Virginia, I know you have issues with iceberg lettuce, but this time of year it is very refreshing because of its high water content.

The locally grown tomatoes looked delicious. When there is an option, locally grown produce is preferred over produce imported from another state or country.

Virginia, requesting vinaigrette instead of ranch or Thousand Island dressing was the healthiest option. The “Homemade by Ron” vinaigrette sounded delicious.

The only thing missing in this meal was a grain. A roll or a side of rice, if available, and this meal would be complete. Virginia, this was a wonderful choice.

JB’s Restaurant

Matt – salad bar? Passing on the creamy soups, puddings and macaroni salads? Drizzling a bit of vinegar and oil instead of drowning the poor little radishes, olives and peppers in Thousand Island or the beloved ranch dressing? Watermelon instead of the sugar- and fat- laden desserts?? If I didn’t know better, I would have thought you were a victim of body snatchers.

Matt, you made excellent choices with the salad bar at JB’s Restaurant. Often, people load up on the high-fat items and dressings and eat more saturated fat and calories than if they consumed a hamburger and French fries. It is important to include a grain in every meal. In this case, the croutons count. Requesting a roll or selecting a grain salad, if available, would be good choices too.

The hot weather causes us to crave lighter dishes such as salads. However, you must choose wisely, otherwise the healthiest part of your lunch might be in name only. Matt, with your unprecedented discipline, this was the healthiest lunch selected. Way to go!

Aquila Con El Taco

It cannot be denied that Mexican food is very appealing and satisfying but can be loaded with saturated fat. However, Matt did find ways to make his meal healthier at Aquila Con El Taco. He must have been reading my columns!

Omitting the fat-laden sour cream garnish is a great way to reduce the fat in any meal. Lard is a common ingredient used in many Mexican restaurants, so inquiring into which dishes contain it will let you know the ones to order or to avoid.

Now, the biggest challenge: the basket of chips. There are several ways to handle this situation; 1) Refuse the chips altogether; 2) request the chips be served with the meal; or 3) Take a small portion on your plate and decide that is it! You must decide your chip strategy prior to entering the restaurant. It will help you be prepared when that happy waiter approaches your table with the dreaded chip basket.

Even though Matt said this meal was light on cheese, omitting it altogether is another way to cut saturated fat. With the large serving of beans and three chicken enchiladas, this meal is heavy on protein. Ordering only one or two enchiladas would have been a better choice. Overall, Matt you did a great job ordering your meal.

Chadwick's Grille

Steve, there are salads and then there is the Cobb Salad. It is hard to call this a salad because the lettuce is just a vehicle for the toppings and dressing. It wouldn't even be missed if it was omitted.

People order this "salad" when they are craving fat but want to feel like they are eating in a "light" manner. The orange-Dijon dressing sounded delicious and was a healthier alternative to the dressing normally used.

Omitting the bacon, blue cheese and hard-boiled eggs would be a start to making this salad healthier, but if you are concerned about saturated fat and cholesterol, just choose another salad altogether.

Steve, at least the word "salad" was in the title of this Chadwick's Grille lunch! I am glad you ordered only half a Cobb- a whole one might have done you in!