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Convenience rather than a treat – my search for healthier options in fast food restaurants.

Saturday, May 18, 2013

I've heard people refer to visiting a fast food restaurant as an occasional "treat." Perhaps it's because I was never a fan of fries, but I never put their food and "treat" in the same sentence. Cheesecake to me is a treat and chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream or even the authentic Mexican food of my local restaurant, but not the menu at the "Big 3."

Still, I cannot and will never be able to say I NEVER patronize fast food establishments. Although I don't consider it a "treat," I do find it to be a necessary convenience.

I admire anyone who plans so well in advance that they never have need of these places, but although I consider myself quite an organized person, that's a level of perfection I've never been able to attain.

Back in the old days when my children were growing up, we would often find ourselves far from home and hungry after some event such as a swim meet in another town. Sometimes far flung errands took longer than anticipated and we needed to eat something.

Here's a recent example. My weekly choral rehearsal is in a city about 1 hour away. I'm not hungry before I leave. It's just too early for me to eat dinner, but I know I won't get through the 2 hour practice without eating something and then there's the drive home.

Even if I packed food from home, I'd have to eat it in my car in the parking lot. This is not the way I want to begin my evening. Enter the convenience of fast food.

So I accept that there are still going to be times when I need food and I need it fast. My goal is to choose as healthy an option as possible. When salads were introduced by the major chains, that seemed to be the obvious choice.

Eventually, I realized how little I was getting for my money. Basically they were selling me a big dish of lettuce with a few tiny pieces of tomato and cucumber. As for the chicken, when I started counting, there were 4 – 5 little pieces. I was paying \$5-\$6 for that. DH, ordering off the "Dollar Menu," gets a whole pile of food in front of him for less cost.

Now those of you who know my efforts to change the choices of the "Junk Food King" realize that I'm not advocating adopting his diet in order to save money. Still, why am I being taken advantage of like this?

I suppose the companies would point out economies of scale. They can afford to sell DH's favorites cheaper because so many people buy them. Yet iceberg lettuce is the cheapest "vegetable" you can buy and they already stock it along with tomatoes to top off their burgers. They sell chicken sandwiches, sometimes even on the dollar menu so how expensive can it be to chop a few pieces into my salad?

Since I haven't had a very recent experience, I've visited the McDonald's website to see what salads

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were still being offered. The pictures look a lot more appetizing than what I remember. Maybe they photographed them with all the chicken on top?

Perhaps they realize that anyone ordering a salad in their establishment has a different goal beyond satisfying their hunger. We want to eat as healthily as possible. Then does this create an opportunity to make some extra profit? That is their right, after all. I just want to be clear about it.

Many sparkers have written about how much more expensive it is to buy healthy food than junk. I don't have the answers only my own solution. That's usually a Veggie Delight or oven-roasted chicken at Subway when convenience is necessary and this month that's only \$3.00.

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MOOSLADY

Have you considered the grocery store express lane? I frequently get caught out with the kids and need to eat cheap but now. We drop into the grocery store, grab a yogurt or cheese, a piece of fruit or two and some bit sized tomatoes. Usually costs about \$1.50- \$2.00 per person. oh, and your junk food king can grab a box of wings, some potato wedges and a tasty dessert. :)

2947 days ago

Comment edited on: 5/20/2013 10:53:07 AM



BOILHAM

Turkey sub at Subway for me.

2948 days ago



JLITT62

Luckily for me, the only time I eat fast food is when we travel. But I actually like McDonald's salads!

2948 days ago



WATERMELLEN

I have a theory about those "fast food chain" salads . . . nobody every orders one. They're on the menu so that people can "plan" to order a salad and then change their minds at the last minute from the anonymity of the drive-thru! What comes out of their mouths is "quarter pounder with cheese and large fries, large Coke"! And that's why they're generally not great. (Plus: the calorie/fat/sodium count on one of the more appetizing salad offerings, like a taco or Caesar type, is often worse than the burger and fries!)

I will go to Tim Hortons, a Canadian coffee chain which has decent wraps etc. And yogurt with berries.

Or Subway.

But: if it's possible, the salad from the deli counter of a grocery store is often a better bet.

2948 days ago



BACK2BASICS

Many grocery stores now have salad bars which include a variety of options to add and make the salad exactly as you would want it. In addition, you can buy a Greek yogurt, or some other form of protein if you don't see what you want on the salad bar.

If you don't want to eat in your car, quite understandable, drive to a park, or even a mall food court.



2948 days ago



DR1939

Fast food was never a treat for me either a I do not care for fries or for hamburgers. We usually eat at Subway when time or travel require that we eat away from home.

2949 days ago



JAHINTZY

I agree, fast food is a necessary convenience for me at times and it can definitely be tough to find something at least half decent. I do think that mcdonalds has gotten better in recent years, there are more things that I don't mind eating to choose from. I'm just not a salad person and I can't stomach the price so I'll usually get the fruit and yogurt parfait or a snack wrap (salt, I know, its why I only say half decent) or even a single burger. I try to aim for something that has at least





some protein value so at least I might not get hungry again too fast. Subway is definitely a better choice but there aren't as many of them around here.

Honestly I always try to go to a Wawa - a most wonderous gas station/convenience/almost grocery local chain. They have a full menu of sandwiches, convenience snacks like pepperoni and cheese, pita and hummus, apples and pb, carrots and celery with dip, drink cases with stuff from water to soda to v8 fusion. not bad. I often wonder what I'd do without that place...
2949 days ago



MISCHAKEO

Yes..Subway is exactly where I go for fast food..I liked their chopped grilled chicken salads. I agree with you that most salads sold are just lettuce and few vegetables. This also happens in chain stores like sharis or dennys.

Sometimes I take cherry tomatoes and celery if I know I will only get a lettuce salad.

Too bad about the cost being higher..but it is worth it.

I also used to take my kids to fast food places after events., I wish I had done more subway.
2949 days ago



CD13750005

I love Subway! When I do go to fast food places, I skip the sides (chicken nuggets, French fries, hush puppies, mozzarella sticks, onion rings, etc.) and I don't order a beverage or dessert. I order a regular-sized sandwich (ie. nothing with more than one patty, no cheese or bacon and, preferably, no breaded chicken/fish) and, even then, I'll usually only eat half of it and save the rest for later. The few times I do eat fast food, I'm usually eating it at home and not at the restaurant itself. Best to get away from the constant smell of the food being made and it also makes it easier to throw together a quick salad with my favorite veggies to have with it, drink water and have a



piece of fruit/granola bar/yogurt for dessert.
2949 days ago



COCK-ROBIN

Wonderful!
2949 days ago



CD13886868

I visit the fast food places, too. When we finished our hike this week, DH and I turned to each other in the car on the way home: "Subway or Burger King?" Subway won out, and it was a better option, at least for me (DH is still eats his Whoppers). I think they're okay on a limited basis and you can get something good. Like another responder said, Wendy's can be semi healthy when you travel--the chili is relatively guilt free and filling and the salads are okay. Pick and choose seems to be our mantra.
2949 days ago



SOPHIEDO13

Thanks for this months subway deal, I might give it a try. Also, so inventive in ordering chicken nuggets extra for the Mc D's salad. Yesterday was my necessary convenience no fries and I splurged on a soda for the car drive we ended up going further (lost) than expected my son stopped at the burger joint in protest, I was starved!! Good blog. Thanks.
2949 days ago



CD13202979

I have to admit that I am a fan of Subway and Wendy's. Wendy's offers me a chili and baked potato option that is both satisfying and healthy and it is not too expensive. I would like to say that I have found a "fast food" salad that I am happy to recommend, but that is definitely not the case. Maybe some day there will be a nice fast food salad that is not too pricey and has a decent amount of veggies.



2949 days ago



GINIEMIE

Subway the slightly healthier choice, I believe. At subway I get a 1/2 sandwich on wheat or multi-grain, no chips and water-when I'm being very careful. When I'm not or I'm starving I have the baked chips-usually I stick with the water because I'm allergic to diet coke and there is no diet root beer, or root beer for that matter.
I'm with you on the packing to eat in the case of... We will be packing snacks for our up coming road trip, only because I'm used to eating 5-6 small meals a day and Erik sticks to 2 or 3. Of course he'd like to stop at every Starbucks and get a Caramel Macciato(sp). Not happening on my shift and it's not for me.



2949 days ago



ONEKIDSMOM

I'm a big Subway fan. Last year when the only option was a McD's in Arkansas, I discovered they had a chicken wrap "snack" that fit my needs at the time... but like you, "necessary convenience" is a better description than "treat".



What I might point out, "in defense of" the fast food places... is the fact that fresh produce doesn't last as long as the highly processed, frozen, drop-in-a-fryer stuff... and they must have spoilage as an "excuse". Still, Subway does it... is it that their target market is just different?



2949 days ago



PICKIE98

yes, and for sweet tooth craves, I like the fruit and yogurt parfait at McDonald's.. for \$1.00 it is healthy and fits the bill!



2949 days ago



WEARINGTHIN

Subway sounds like a very good choice. The burger and fry places don't compare in terms of looking out for your health. And there are a lot of Subways. Glenn



2949 days ago

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