

## The Best and Worst Restaurants in America

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Saturday, June 20th, 2009: Eating out invariably raises a number of tricky questions: Sit-down or drive-thru? Burgers or pizza? Thin or stuffed crust? Choosing one over the other could mean saving hundreds of calories in a single meal, and up to 50 pounds of flab in the course of a year and countless health woes over the course of a lifetime. That's why Eat This, Not That! launched an investigation and put 66 major chain restaurants under the nutritional microscope—so that you and your family can continue to eat out, but do so knowing the types of insider tips and savvy strategies that can help melt fat all year long. And the good news is that many fan favorites scored top marks!

To separate the commendable from the deplorable, we calculated the total number of calories per entrée. This gave us a snapshot of how each restaurant compared in average serving size—a key indicator of unhealthy portion distortion. Then we rewarded establishments with fruit and vegetable side-dish choices, as well as for providing whole-grain options. Finally, we penalized places for excessive amounts of trans fats and menus laden with gut-busting desserts. What we ended up with is the Eat This, Not That! Restaurant Report Card, which will show you how all of the nation's largest eating establishments stack up nutritionally.

**1) Applebee's:** We've tried repeatedly to get Applebee's to cough up the nutritional information on their menu items, but the food mogul refuses to cave. Without full disclosure, we have no choice but to give them a flunking grade. (And while Applebee's takes it sweet time coming clean, we took advantage of New York legislation requiring chain restaurants to publish calorie counts to find out what they're hiding. As you'll see from the numbers below, plenty.)

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The saving grace on the Applebee's menu is the handful of items created in partnership with Weight Watchers®, the only items for which the restaurant offers any nutritional information at all. Unfortunately that doesn't leave you much to choose from, but unless you want to play Russian roulette with your health, you're better off sticking to this menu.

**2) Arby's:** Too bad Arby's didn't toss out their oversized breads when they removed the trans fats from the fries in 2006. If they had, you wouldn't have to worry about the extra 360 calories in the honey wheat sandwich bread. In fact, Arby's might be just a little too proud of its trans-fat free frying oil; the restaurant doesn't offer a single side that hasn't had a hot bath in the stuff.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Don't think you're doing yourself any favors by ordering off the Market Fresh menu. You're far better off with a Roast Beef or Melt Sandwich, which will save you an average of nearly 300 Calories over a Market Fresh sandwich or wrap.

**3) Atlanta Bread Company:** The bad news is the breakfast menu is riddled with unnecessary fats and refined carbohydrates, and most of the sandwiches are served with a fattening gob of mayonnaise. The good news is that there's also a robust selection of healthy soups and salads to offset these problems, so focus your appetite on this section, and you'll escape relatively unscathed.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Atlanta Bread Company lets you order a half sandwich with a half salad or a cup of soup, which are perfect compromises for those who prefer a hand-held lunch. Ask them to hold the mayo on your sandwich and this is a pretty safe bet. And unless you plan on splitting, avoid the pizzas, pastas, and calzones at all costs.

**4) Au Bon Pain:** Sure the menu has its pitfalls, but what menu doesn't? The bottom line is that Au Bon Pain combines an extensive inventory of healthy items with an unrivaled standard of nutritional transparency. Each store has an on-site nutritional kiosk to help customers find a meal to meet their expectations, and the variety of ordering options provides dozens of paths to a sensible meal.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Most of the café sandwiches are in the 650-calorie range, so make a lean meal instead by combining a hot soup with one of the many low-calorie options on the Portions menu. And if you must indulge, eschew the baked goods in favor of a cup of fruit and yogurt, or serving of chocolate-covered almonds.

**5) Auntie Anne's:** Is there anything redeeming on Auntie Anne's menu? Not really. The average pretzel is about 360 calories of refined carbohydrates, and they supplement the twisted-bread menu with a long list of sweetened beverages and blended smoothies. That being said, you can find far worse indulgences on just about any dessert menu in the country. If you're the sharing type—and you most certainly should be—odds are good that you will survive the occasional visit to ol' Auntie Anne's.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Avoid any pretzel with the word "sugar" or "glazing" in the name, or else you risk spiking your blood with 40 grams of quick-burning carbs. Then cut the fat and half the sodium by skipping the butter and salt, relying instead on a healthier dipping sauce such as marinara or sweet mustard for big flavor.

**6) Baja Fresh:** It's a surprise Baja Fresh's menu has yet to collapse under the weight of its own fatty fare. About a third of the items on the menu have more than 1,000 calories, and most of them are spiked with enough sodium to melt a polar icecap. Order the Shrimp Burrito Dos Manos Enchilado-Style, for instance, and you're looking at 5,130 mg sodium—that's more than 2 days' worth in one sitting!

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Unless you're comfortable stuffing 110 grams of fat into your arteries, avoid the nachos at all costs. In fact, avoid almost everything on this menu. The only safe options are the tacos, or a salad topped with salsa verde and served without the elephantine tortilla bowl.

**7) Baskin-Robbins:** We thought we'd see some improvements after we identified Baskin's Heath Shake as the Worst Drink on the Planet. Unfortunately, all they did was lower it from 2,300 to 1,900 calories, leaving an almost equally egregious liquid gut bomb to do damage to unsuspecting sippers. The reality is that it would take more than just a little pruning to really clean up this menu; its soft serve is among the most caloric in the country, the smoothies contain more sugar than fruit, and anything that Baskin sticks into a cup winds up with more fat than a steakhouse buffet. Check out our list of the 20 Unhealthiest Drinks in America to see other liquid offenders.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** With frozen yogurt, sherbet, and no-sugar-added ice cream, Baskin's lighter menu is the one bright spot on the menu. Just be sure to ask for it in a sugar or cake cone—the waffle cone will swaddle your treat in an extra 160 calories.

**8) Ben and Jerry's:** What sets B&J's apart from the competition amounts to more than just an affinity for jam bands and green pastures. The shop also adheres to a lofty commitment to the quality and source of its ingredients. The milk that goes into the ice cream is free from rBGH growth hormones, and the chocolate, vanilla, and coffee ingredients are all Fair Trade Certified. That being said, ice cream is still an indulgence and should be treated as such.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** With half the calories of the ice cream, sorbet makes for the healthiest choice on the menu. But for those who demand a little dairy, the ice-cream shop's frozen yogurt can still save you up to 100 calories per scoop.

**9) Blimpie:** In the first of the Eat This, Not That! books, we admonished Blimpie for its use of trans fats in cookies, soups, and breads. Since then the multinational chain has quietly removed all the dangerous oils from its menu and earned itself a worthy spot in our good book. But that doesn't mean that the menu is completely free from danger. Blimpie likes to splash oil on just about everything with deli meat, and there are a handful of subs that top the 1,000-calorie mark.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** A ham Bluffin makes a decent start to the day, and the Grilled Chicken Sandwich is one of the best in the sandwich business. But be sure to skip the wraps and the most of the hot sandwiches—many of them pack a caloric wallop. And no matter which sandwich you chose, tell the sub maestro behind the counter to hold the oil and mayo, and ask instead for a spread of mustard or light dressing.

**10) Bob Evans:** Sure there are plenty of healthy entrée and side options on the menu, but don't let yourself be sucked in by the more gratuitous Southern-style creations. Some of Bob's food still suffers from a soggy case of trans-fat overload. The Stacked & Stuffed Pancakes, for instance, have between 6 and 9 grams per serving,

and the Slow Roasted Chicken Pot Pie has a near heart-stopping 13 grams—not to mention the nearly 3,000 mg of sodium.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Bob Evans became famous for its sausage, but each link on your plate adds 125 calories, 80 percent of which is pure fat. Opt instead for breakfast staples like oatmeal, eggs, fruit, and yogurt, which are all available as a Fit From the Farm Breakfasts that come with Turkey Links to quell the sausage cravings with less than half the fat.

**11) Boston Market:** With more than a dozen healthy vegetable sides and lean meats like turkey and roast sirloin on the menu, the low-cal, high-nutrient possibilities at Boston Market are endless. But with nearly a dozen calorie-packed sides and fatty meats like dark meat chicken and meat loaf, it's almost as easy to construct a lousy meal.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** There are three simple steps to nutritional salvation: 1) Start with turkey, sirloin, or rotisserie chicken. 2) Add two noncreamy, nonstarchy vegetable sides. 3) Ignore all special items, such as pot pie and nearly all of the sandwiches.

**12) Burger King:** We got word from Burger King in October 2008 that they were finally removing the trans fats from its deep fryer. That's an undisputed victory for the nutritional advocates, but don't think that means Burger King's menu is completely sans trans fat. The burgers and Whoppers are still sullied with the dangerous oils, with some harboring as many as 3 grams apiece. What's just as bad is that BK likes to smear 160 calories' worth of mayonnaise on just about everything, so you better get used to asking for you sandwich without.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** There are only two burgers you should even consider: the regular hamburger or the Whopper Jr. without mayo. Other decent options include the Chicken Tenders, the 9-piece Chicken Fries, or for breakfast, the Ham Omelet Sandwich. Pair any of these with BK's Fresh Apple Fries (fresh apples slices served with low-fat caramel dipping sauce) and a zero-calorie beverage, and you'll walk out with a decent meal that has less than 500 calories.

**13) Carl's Jr.:** Most fast-food restaurants today are making at least some attempt to offset their bulging burgers and deep-fried sides with healthier options such as lean sandwiches or yogurt parfaits. But Carl's Jr. is swimming against the nutritional current, trying to wrangle in the last of a dying breed of customers who refuse to make health a concern. The lightest item on the breakfast menu, for instance, are the Hash Brown Nuggets—but even they have 21 grams of fat, and 5.5 of them are trans. The burgers are worse, and there's not a side on the menu that hasn't been given a long, hot bath in their trans-fatty frying oil.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Fast-food chains tend to group in clusters, so your first strategy should be to find another place to grab lunch. Failing that, you should settle on either the Charbroiled Chicken Salad with Low-Fat Balsamic Dressing or the Charbroiled BBQ Chicken Sandwich, the only sandwich on the menu with fewer than 400 calories.

**14) Chevy's:** Don't let the made-fresh-daily shtick distract you from the massive portions that push many of Chevy's meals beyond the 1,000-calorie threshold. The taco trader earns its dismal grade in three major ways: One is the consistently dangerous amount of fat in its entrees (the average salad has 67 grams). The second is the outrageous salt levels that make it difficult to find a meal with fewer than 2,000 mg of sodium. Finally the chain earns its poor score by failing to offer complete nutritional disclosure. It provides no information for its appetizers or quesadillas, for instance, and although it maintains it uses trans-fat free oils, there's no trans-fat data for the full entrees.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The best items on the menu are the Homemade Tortilla Soup and the Santa Fe Chopped Salad, which has only 470 calories when you order it without cheese. If you can't resist an entrée, order it without all the fixin's—tamalito, rice, sour cream, and cheese. That should knock more than 300 calories off your meal.

**15) Chick-fil-A:** Between the breakfast and lunch menus, there are only two entrées at Chick-Fil-A that break 500 calories, a rare feat in the fast-food world. What this means is that you can't possibly do too much harm—especially if you stick to the chicken. And unlike the typical fast-food chain, Chick-Fil-A offers a list of sides that goes beyond breaded and fried potatoes and onions. (Just beware the large cole slaw, which adds an extra 600 calories to your daily intake!) That's why we dub the Atlanta-based chicken shack one of our all-time favorite fast-food restaurants.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The worst thing you can do is supplement your meal with a milkshake—not a single cup has fewer than 600 calories. And instead of nuggets or strips, look to the Chargrilled Chicken Sandwiches, which average only 320 calories apiece.

**16) Chili's:** From burgers to baby back ribs, Chili's serves up some of the saltiest and fattiest fare we've ever seen. In fact, with 3,810 mg of sodium and 122 grams of fat, Chili's Smokehouse Bacon Triple Cheese Big Mouth Burger earns the distinction as being one of the worst burgers in America. The Guiltless Grill menu is Chili's attempt to offer healthier options, but with only eight items and an average sodium count of 1,320 mg, it's a meager attempt at nutritional salvation.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** There's not too much to choose from after you cut the ribs, burgers, fajitas, chicken, and salads. You're better off with a Classic Sirloin and steamed vegetables or broccoli. Another decent option is the Chicken Fajita Pita with Black Beans and Pico de Gallo. Whatever you do, don't order an appetizer—one from Chili's made it on our list of Worst Appetizers in America

**17) Chipotle:** There are only a few bad items on Chipotle's menu: the 290-calorie flour tortillas, the 130-calorie servings of white rice, and the 570-calorie portions of chips. Unfortunately with Chipotle's pared-down menu, these are the staple comestibles that form the backbone to most meals. Without realizing it, the careless customer can easily construct a thousand-calorie burrito. Drop some chips alongside it, and the meal reaches dangerous levels of calories, fat, and sodium. Still, Chipotle gets bonus points for using responsible, sustainable purveyors like Niman Ranch to fill out their fridges.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Chipotle assures us that they'll make anything a customer wants, as long as they have the ingredients. With fresh salsa, beans, lettuce, and grilled vegetables, you can do plenty of good. Unfortunately, with 13-inch tortillas, cheese, and huge scoops of white rice, you can do plenty of harm, too. Stick to one of our 450-calorie favorites: Three crispy tacos with carnitas, black beans, lettuce, and fresh salsa.

**18) Chuck E. Cheese's:** While the average impact of a regular slice at Chuck E.'s stacks up well with most other pie places, it's the other areas of the menu that don't make the grade. The restaurant doesn't do parents any favors by supplementing the menu with oversized sandwiches or by being the only major pizza chain in America without a thin-crust option. The distraction of video games may be the best thing Chuck E. Cheese has going for itself.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The safest bet is the salad bar, but good luck getting the kids to eat anything but pizza. Otherwise, stick to the Canadian bacon and vegetable toppings, and cap the munching at two slices. That should keep the damage below 500 calories.

**19) Cici's Pizza Buffet:** Cici's began in Texas in 1985 and now boasts more than 600 locations, proving definitively that Americans love a good buffet. The good news for our waistlines is that the crust is moderately sized, and the pizza comes in varieties beyond simple sausage and pepperoni. But if you check your willpower at the door, you're probably better off skipping the pizza buffet entirely.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** It takes 20 minutes for your brain to tell your body it's full, so start with a salad and then proceed slowly to the pizza. Limit yourself to the healthier slices like the Zesty Vegetable, Alfredo, and the Olé, which is a Mexican-inspired pie with only 108 calories per slice.

**20) Cold Stone Creamery:** "Overindulge" is the silent message emanating from every ice-cream menu board in the country, and Cold Stone is no different. In fact, their largest size ice cream bears the dubious name

""Gotta Have It"". Small milkshakes weigh in at 1,000 calories, and even a modest scoop of ice cream can be spoiled with an extra 190 calories' worth of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups sprinkled on top. On the other hand, Cold Stone gives its menu an air of manageability by offering a nice variety of sorbet, frozen yogurt, and Sinless Sans Fat ice cream.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Keep it in the 200-calorie range by filling a 5-ounce, Like It-size cup with one of the lighter scoops, and then sprinkle fresh fruit on top. Or opt for one of the creamery's 16-ounce real-fruit smoothies, which average only 290 calories apiece. Così

Answering the call for healthier options, Così recently unveiled the new Lighten Up! Menu, which relies on light dressings, low-fat mayo, and modest cheese servings to turn some of the more egregious menu items into some fairly decent nosh. That's a step in the right direction, to be sure, but it does little to rein back the breakfast menu's oversized muffins or bagel-sandwich belt busters, and every sandwich flanked by Così's Etruscan Whole Grain Bread is still saddled with an extra 470 calories from the oversized bread.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Get cozy with Così's Lighten Up! Menu. Only two items top the 500-calorie mark: the Light Cobb Salad and the Light Chicken T.B.M.

**21) Dairy Queen:** Dairy Queen has a taste for excess that rivals that of other fast-food failures such as Carl's Jr. and Hardees. But unlike Carl's, DQ offers a whole slew of abominable ice cream creations to wash down its sodium-spiked, trans-fatty foods. Here's a look at one hypothetical meal: A Bacon Cheddar GrillBurger with Onion Rings and a Small Snickers Blizzard, a staggering 1,740-calorie meal with 2,640 mg sodium and 83 grams of fat—2 grams of which are trans fats.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** If you're looking for real nutrition, you won't find it here, so your best strategy is to play solid defense. Skip elaborate burgers, fried sides, and specialty ice cream concoctions entirely. Order a Grilled Chicken Sandwich or an Original Burger, and if you must have a treat, stick to a scoop of soft serve or a small sundae.

**22) Denny's:** Too bad the adult menu at Denny's doesn't adhere to the same standard as the kids' menu. The famous Slam breakfasts all top 800 calories, and the burgers are even worse. The Double Cheeseburger is one of the worst in the country, with 116 grams of fat, 7 of which are trans fats. (That might explain why it made our list of worst burgers in America. Make sure to avoid it (and all others on the list) at all costs!)

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The Fit Fare menu gathers together all the best options on the menu. Outside of that, stick to the sirloin, grilled chicken, or soups. For breakfast order a Veggie Cheese Omelet or create your own meal from a la carte options such as fruit, oatmeal, toast, and eggs.

**23) Domino's:** The risks facing Domino's pies are the same as those facing any other pizza purveyor: oversized crusts, fatty meats, and greasy shag carpets of cheese. But Domino's Crunchy Thin Crust cheese pizza is one of the lowest-calorie pies in America, which makes a ground foundation for a decent dinner. Just avoid the breadsticks and Domino's Oven Baked Sandwiches, which have average of 37 grams of fat apiece and enough sodium to fill your entire day's quota.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Domino's thin crust has fewer calories than any other pizza chain's. Show your appreciation by making it your go-to order. Want toppings? Stick to ham and pineapple, or pure veggies.

**24) Dunkin' Donuts:** Recent years have seen some big-league improvements from the Dunkin' camp. The donut king cast out the trans fats in 2007, and they've been pushing the menu toward healthier options since. The most recent maneuver is the DDSmart Menu, which draws out the menu's nutritional champions, and introduces the low-fat and protein-packed Egg White Turkey Sausage Flatbread Sandwich. Now there's no excuse to settle for bagels, muffins, or donuts, which are still as carb-heavy and nutritionally empty as ever.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Use the DDSmart Menu as a starting point, then stick to the sandwiches served on flatbread or English muffins. If you must order donuts, stick to a classic glazed and avoid cake donuts at all cost.

**25) Einstein Bros Bagels:** It's a shame that half the items on this menu come served on or with a bagel, especially considering that each one comes loaded with twice as many carbs as a donut. And outside the bagel menu, not a wrap or specialty sandwich has fewer than 500 calories. An occasional bagel won't kill you, but a habit of these oversized sandwiches might be grounds for a new gym membership.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The best lunch option is the pairing of a half-deli sandwich with a cup of soup. And if they ask you to pick a side, take the Kettle Chips or the fruit salad over the mayo-drenched Traditional Potato Salad or 650-calorie Cole Slaw.

**26) Fazoli's:** When it comes to the kids' menu, you won't find a better Italian restaurant. Unfortunately the grown-ups aren't treated with the same respect. An ill-formed pasta dish with a single breadstick might eat up 60 percent of your day's calories, and if you're looking for whole-wheat pasta, you won't find it here. What sets Fazoli's apart from the competition, however, is the option to order smaller portions and top your pasta with your choice of fresh vegetables and lean protein. And just tell that guy with the free breadsticks to get lost.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Among the small pasta bowls, there's not a single one with more than 520 calories. Give your noodles some extra protein and fiber by topping them off with peppery chicken and broccoli.

**27) Five Guys Burgers and Fries:** Without much more than burgers, hot dogs, and French fries on the menu, it's difficult to find anything nutritionally redeeming about Five Guys. The only option geared toward the health-conscious is the Veggie Sandwich, which also happens to be the only item on the menu to carry a load of trans fats. The burgers range from 480 to 920 calories, so how you order can make a big difference to your waistline.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The regular hamburger is actually a double, so order a Little Hamburger and load up on the vegetation. And if you must indulge somewhere, don't do it with the fries—the difference between a large and a small is 1,150 calories.

**28) Haagen-Dazs:** Häagen-Dazs doesn't provide nutritional information for the many in-house concoctions to be made from its ice cream, but if its regular soft serve and packaged ice cream (the most caloric in the supermarket) are any indication, the numbers can't be good. And the many sundaes, shakes, and cakes on offer are surefire ways to double down on the danger. The one thing we do appreciate about Häagen-Dazs is the simplicity of their recipes (just five familiar ingredients in many of their ice creams), but they'll need to adjust their sugar and cream ratios before we can proclaim this place a safe place to eat.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The frozen yogurts all hover around the 200-calorie range, and the sorbets are closer to 120. Wander far from there, and you're looking at a 300-calorie minimum for a small scoop of ice cream.

**29) Hardees:** A 1997 purchase by CKE Restaurants put Hardee's under the same parent company as Carl's Jr., and the adopted brothers are slowly coming to look like identical twins. Both joints offer the horrendous Six-Dollar Burger, but Hardee's menu spirals even further down the nutritional black hole with an expanded line that includes the Monster Thickburger. But while Hardee's elongated menu tips toward the heavy side, it also serves up more modest choices, which helps the little adoptee earn a slightly less dismal grade than its big brother.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Choose a breakfast sandwich topped with ham or jelly, and avoid anything served in a bowl or platter. Then for lunch, stick to single-patty burgers or ask for a Regular Roast Beef Sandwich.

**30) IHOP:** We knew IHOP was up to no good when it refused to reveal its nutritional information when first asked in 2007. But not even our suspicions could prepare us for the numbers that hit the board when a New York City law forced them to post their calorie counts: 1,200-calorie crepes, 1,300-calorie breakfast combos, and 1,800-calorie Crispy Chicken Strips. We give the restaurant an F for its closed-door policy, but it might not score much better even if we crunched the numbers.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** A short stack of pancakes or a single Belgian waffle are two of the only breakfasts that will get you out under 700 calories. As for the lunch and dinner, very few entrees have less than 1,000 calories.

Your only safe bet is to stick to the ""IHOP For Me"" menu on the back page, where you'll find the nutritional content for a small selection of healthier items.

**31) In-N-Out Burger:** In-N-Out's is the most pared down of all the burger-joint menus. Wander in and you'll find nothing more than burgers, fries, shakes, and sodas. While that's certainly nothing to build a diet on, In-N-Out earns major points for offering the Protein-Style burger, which replaces the carb-heavy bun with lettuce and saves you 150 calories.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** A single cheeseburger and a glass of iced tea or H2O make for a reasonable lunch, but if you want to opt for the formidable Double Double, learn to say ""Protein Style, please."" If not, you're looking at 1,000-calorie meal—and that's before you add in fries and a drink.

**32) Jack in the Box:** This menu has plenty of suitable options, but where it fails, it fails in dangerous ways. At least half a dozen burgers surpass the detrimental 1,000-calorie mark, and everything that touches Jack's fryer emerges with a soggy load of trans fats. Order a side of Bacon Cheddar Potato Wedges, for instance, and you'll clog your arteries with 12 grams of trans fat, which is about six times the daily limit set by the American Heart Association.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Keep your burger small or order a Whole Grain Chicken Fajita Pita—one of the best fast-food chicken entrees out there—with a fruit cup on the side. For breakfast order any Breakfast Jack without sausage. And whatever you do, don't touch the fried foods.

**33) Jimmy John's:** Too bad Jimmy adheres to the bigger-is-better syndrome that pollutes countless sub shops all over this country. Two slices of its 7-Grain Wheat Bread, before you stuff in the meat and spackle on the mayonnaise, runs at an unreasonable 390 calories, which means it takes a practiced patron to walk out with a decent sub. Good thing Jimmy's preps the food right in front of you, that way you can play foreman while the sub crew constructs your perfect low-cal sandwich.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Start with the sub-sized French bread, which has about 140 fewer calories than its wheat cousin. Then build a sub from a single lean meat—either ham, turkey, or roast beef—being sure to replace mayo with Dijon or avocado spread. Oh, and stay away from the Italian cold cuts!

**34) KFC:** What no nutritionist wants to admit is that most fried chicken joints aren't the health hazards we make them out to be. KFC, the most vilified of the fried-chicken purveyors, makes an exemplary case-in-point. The menu's crispy bird-bits are offset by skinless chicken pieces, low-calorie sandwich options, and a host of sides that go way beyond the typical battered-and-fried potatoes and nuggets. And with meals that allow you to hand pick each piece that goes on your plate, you won't be forced to square off with that big, crusty, 5-gallon bucket of fried chicken.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Go the skinless route or pal up with a Chicken Stacker or a Toasted Sandwich. Then adorn your plate with one of the colonel's healthy sides: Corn on the Cob, Three-Bean Salad, or KFC Mean Greens.

**35) Krispy Kreme:** Unlike Dunkin' Donuts, which is expanding its menu to include more legitimate options, Krispy Kreme is stuck in the carb-heavy world of glazed, powdered, and jelly-filled dough rings. The only ""improvement"" it has made recently is to revamp its beverage selection with Chillers, frozen beverages that can pack more than a thousand calories into a 20-ounce cup. The good news is that Krispy Kreme has finally cut trans fat from its donuts. The bad news is a single donut can still carry more than half-a-day's saturated fat and more sugar than a Snickers bar.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Cap your sweet tooth at one filled or specialty donut or, worst case scenario, two glazed. The Krispy Kreme Original is the reasonable thing on the menu, with 10 grams of sugar and 12 grams of fat.

**36) Little Ceasars:** The quick-draw pizza maker has speed down to an art. Too bad efficiency has to come at the cost of options. Like Chuck E. Cheese, Little Caesar's doesn't offer a thin-crust pie, which automatically

puts them at a caloric disadvantage. And at least Chuck E. Cheese makes up for it with a salad bar. The Caesar might suffice in a pinch, but if you've got time, seek out a better option up the road.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Start with a few chicken wings to get some belly-filling protein in your system before moving on to pizza. Since Little Caesar's isn't selling thin crusts, you'll have to settle for a regular cheese pizza. Just be sure to close the box after two slices.

**37) Long John Silver's:** Blame a stubborn reliance on partially hydrogenated oils for the sheen of trans fat that coats nearly everything to emerge from Long John's kitchen. LJ's signature fish planks will be a lot less detrimental on the day they decide to ditch the bad oil. The fish mogul already has the healthy sides in place, with options such as Vegetable Medley and Corn Cobbettes. But for now it's just not safe to eat fried food at a place where a snack-size box of Breaded Clam Strips means 7 grams of trans fats gobbled into your bloodstream.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The only fish to avoid the trans-fatty oils are those that are grilled or baked. Pair one of those options with a healthy side. If you need some extra flavor, choose cocktail sauce or malt vinegar over tartar sauce—you'll save 9 grams of fat with that one simple move.

**38) Manchu Wok:** It's difficult to choose the healthier option when the names of the dishes provide no insight as to which are fit-making and which are fat-making. The Spicy Chicken or the Orange Chicken? The wrong choice means loading your plate with an additional 250 calories. (Hint: The Orange Chicken has more than twice as much fat.) Even more damaging, though, is the heaping mound of refined carbohydrates that comes with most Manchu meals. Rice or noodles are the options, and both mean blood-sugar spikes and fat storage.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** If you can't remember which chicken dishes are the best, just stick go with the red meat. Not a single beef dish has more than 180 calories per serving. Then ask for vegetables instead of noodles. If you must order a starch, choose the lo mein—easily the best carb on the menu.

**39) McDonald's:** The world-famous burger baron has come a long way since the days of Fast Food Nation—at least nutritionally speaking. The trans fats are mostly gone, the number of gut-wrecking calorie bombs are now fewer than ever, and the menu holds plenty of healthy options such as salads and yogurt parfaits. Don't cut loose at the counter just yet, though. Too many of the breakfast and lunch sandwiches still top the 500-calorie mark, and the dessert menu is fodder for some major belly-building.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The Egg McMuffin remains one of the best ways to start your day in the fast-food world—feel free to use it as a replacement option for any of these eight worst fast food breakfasts in America! As for the later hours, you can splurge on a Big Mac or a Quarter Pounder, but only if you skip the fries and soda, which add an average of 590 calories onto any meal.

**40) Olive Garden:** We initially gave the Garden an F, for failing to disclose their nutritional content. And we really appreciate the effort they've made to increase their transparency. But when a typical entree packs an average of 830 calories per dish (and that's before you factor in appetizers, sides, drinks and desserts), it's not time to celebrate just yet.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** It's not easy finding a reasonable-sized meal at Olive Garden, but it's possible. While most pasta dishes are packed with a day's worth of sodium and over a thousand calories, the Linguine alla Marinara or Ravioli di Portobello are both reasonable options. As for chicken and seafood, stick with the Herb Grilled Salmon, Parmesan Crusted Tilapia, or Shrimp and Asparagus Risotto. And avoid all appetizers, unless you're ordering a garden salad or a single serving of minestrone.

**41) On the Border:** On the Border is a subsidiary of Brinker International, the same parent company that owns Chili's and Romano's Macaroni Grill. It should come as no surprise then that its food is just as detrimental to your health as its corporate brothers. The elephantine menu suffers from appetizers with 120 grams of fat, salads with a full day's worth of sodium, and taco entrées with no fewer than 960 calories—and that's the calculation without rice and beans. Hope you left your appetite at home.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The Border Smart Menu highlights four items with fewer than 600 calories and 25 grams of fat. Those aren't great numbers considering they average 1,800 mg of sodium apiece, but that's all you've got to work with.

**42) Outback:** You wouldn't order a meal if the restaurant refused to tell you the price, would you? So why is it okay for them to without the nutritional information? Fat, calories, and sodium are all just as much a part of the overall cost of a meal as the dollar value. That's why we flunk Outback along with the rest of the nutritional holdouts. You don't show up for the test, you can't make the grade.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Aside from taking the kitchen hostage and making your own meal, there's not much you can do to improve your visit at Outback. If you must have an appetizer, split the Seared Ahi Tuna, then move on to a filet, prime rib, or split the 14 oz. New York Strip. Assuming you skip the bread and house salad (590 calories), and you chose wild rice and steamed vegetables as your two sides, you might have a shot at escaping dinner for less than 1,000 calories.

**43) P.F. Chang's:** A plague of quadruple-digit entrees turns Chang's menu into a nutritional minefield, so doing battle here takes careful preparation. Noodle dishes and foods from the grill all come with dangerously high fat and calorie counts, while traditional stir-fries are either surprisingly decent (Chicken with Black Bean Sauce) or appallingly bad (Orange Peel Beef). Chang's does have a few virtues, namely a great variety of low-cal appetizers, and an ordering flexibility that allows for easy substitutions, tweaks, and special treatments like ""wok velveting"", which replaces oil with vegetable stock in the cooking process.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Start with a lean appetizer like the Chicken Lettuce Wraps or the Seared Ahi Tuna, and resolve to split one of the more reasonable entrees between two people. (Whatever you do, don't feel compelled to order one entrée per person—these massive dishes are meant to be shared!) Earn bonus points by tailoring your dish to be light on the oil and sauce.

**44) Panda Express:** Oddly enough, it's not the wok-fried meat or the viscous sauces that cause this menu the most harm; it's the 400 calories of rice and noodles that form the backbone of each meal. Scrape these starches from the plate and Panda Express starts to look a lot healthier: Not one single-entrée meal with more than 500 calories and hardly a trans fat on the menu. Gut-bloating problems arise when multiple entrees and sides start piling up onto one plate, so make sure you drag your self-control along with you up to the ordering window.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Avoid these entrees: Orange Chicken, Sweet & Sour Chicken, Beijing Beef, and anything with pork. Then tell the scoop-master to cut your steamed rice down to a third of the usual portion.

**45) Panera Bread:** Make no mistake about the caloric catastrophes scattered among Panera's menu. Artesian they may be, but some of the sandwiches push into quadruple digits, and a train-length list of brownies, pastries, and cookies almost qualify Panera as a dessert shop with a few food options instead of the other way around. But pitfalls aside, the healthy selection of soups and salads offers a much-needed reprieve from the carb-heavy bagels and breads for which the company is so famous. Just keep your soup from the doughy clutches of the sourdough bread bowl; it has more calories than a Big Mac.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Breakfast options abound with refined carbohydrates, so cut your losses and order the Egg & Cheese breakfast sandwich. Skip the stand-alone sandwich lunch. Either pair together a soup and salad, or take the soup and half-sandwich combo.

**46) Papa John's:** Give PJ's credit for being the only pizza franchise to offer a whole-wheat crust, thus providing a viable, fiber-rich option to those pizza lovers the country over. Combine that with an innovative list of healthy toppings—combinations such as the surprisingly lean Spinach Alfredo and Garden Fresh Pizza—and you start to see hope for Papa John's devotees. Unfortunately the chain loses big points for its line of treacherous dipping sauces, its belly-building breadsticks, and its pan-crust pizza, which is one of the worst we've seen at 400 calories per slice.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** There are only two crust options to consider: thin or wheat. Ask for light cheese and cover it with anything besides sausage, pepperoni, or bacon. If you're still hungry after two slices, have a chicken strip or two to top off the meal.

**47) Pizza Hut:** In an attempt to push the menu beyond the ill-reputed pizza, Pizza Hut expanded into toasted sandwiches, pastas, and salads. Sound like an improvement? Think again. Every sandwich has at least 680 calories and 75 percent of your day's sodium. The salads aren't much better and the pastas are actually worse. That doesn't necessarily make Pizza Hut the worst parlor in the country, but it does put the pies in perspective. A thin-crust slice of Cheese Pizza has about 190 calories. Eat a couple of those and you'll be doing just fine.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Start with a bowl of Tomato Basil Soup, and then finish with a couple slices. The absolute best choices are on the Fit 'n Delicious menu, which offers slices as low as 150 calories apiece.

**48) Popeyes:** With the exception of the mayo-loaded Deluxe Sandwich, Popeyes' menu isn't burdened by any items with more than 600 calories. Unless you go with all fried foods, the Louisiana Kitchen makes it easy to get a nutritional bang for your caloric buck. The only dark spot on this chain's resume is the trans fat lingering in its frying oil. The calories might be low, but everything with skin in tact is carrying a load of the heart-clogging fats.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The average piece of skinless chicken has less than a fifth the fat of the regular crispy cuts. And when it comes to sides, mashed potatoes and the Cajun-specialty Crawfish Etouffee trounce plain ol' French fries. Stick with these and you'll be just fine.

**49) Quiznos:** Submarine sandwiches can only be so bad, right? We thought so, too, until we saw some of bloated offerings on Quiznos' menu. The bigger subs can easily carry a full day's worth of saturated fat and two days' of sodium, and the oversized salads aren't much better. Good thing Quiznos also provides an alternative. The sub shop's Sammies are served in flatbreads, and all fall between 200 and 300 calories apiece.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Avoid the salads, large subs, and bread-bowl soups. Stick with a small sub or pair a Sammie with a cup of soup.

**50) Red Lobster:** Talk about a turnaround. Red Lobster improved from a score of F, for failing to disclose their nutritional information, to an A-, making it the best sit-down chain restaurant in America. And if it weren't for several deep-fried fish dishes or fat-filled sauces, this seafood joint would have scored even higher.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Avoid calorie-heavy Cajun sauces, combo dishes, and anything labeled "'crispy'"-- meaning deep fried. Otherwise, you're basically safe to order at will and tuck in, guilt-free.

**51) Romano's Macaroni Grill:** For years now we've been on Romano's case to clean up the menu at his beloved Macaroni Grill. So far we've had no luck. The fatty Italian spot serves some of the worst appetizers in the country, offers not one dinner entrée with fewer than 800 calories, and hosts no fewer than 60 menu items with more than 2,000 mg of sodium—almost an entire day's worth of the salt! A select few menu items earn the restaurant's Sensible Fare logo—a fork with a halo over it—but unfortunately these items can still carry up to 640 calories and 25 grams of fat.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Thankfully Macaroni Grill will let you build your own dish. Ask for the marinara over a bed of the restaurant's whole-wheat penne, and then top it with grilled chicken and steamed vegetables. Just watch out for their salads—one of them made our list of America's Worst Salads, so beware!

**52) Ruby Tuesday:** The chain earned its fame off a hearty selection of hamburgers. The problem is that they average 75 grams of fat apiece—more than enough to exceed the USDA's recommended limit for the day. Even the veggie and turkey burgers have more than 850 calories! The chain rounds out its menu with a selection of appetizers that hover around 1,000 calories (supposedly to be split 4-ways), a smattering of high-impact entrées like potpie and ribs, and an egregious selection of salads that is just as bad.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Solace lies in the three Ss: steak, seafood, and sides. Sirloins, salmon, and shrimp all make for relatively innocuous eating, especially when paired with one of Ruby Tuesday's half dozen healthy sides such as mashed cauliflower and baby green beans.

**53) Sbarro:** Please welcome Sbarro to the list of shameful restaurants that refuse to disclose their food facts. As of this writing, the nutritional information on Sbarro's Web site is frozen in a permanent state of ""under construction."" Sounds like a pizza pie to the face of anyone who cares about eating healthy. We'll be happy to revise the grade once Sbarro cleans up the scaffolding and jack hammers, and reveals a site teeming with nutritional transparency. In the meantime, proceed with caution.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Sbarro serves up massive NY-style slices, so keep it to one and be sure to make it of the thin-crust variety. Round out the meal with a side of fruit, or a tomato and cucumber salad.

**54) Schlotzky's:** Although none of Schlotzsky's menu items crosses the 1,000-calorie threshold, far too many of them come dangerously close. More than half the small-size subs are more than 500 calories, and there are small amounts of trans fats in everything from pizzas to paninis. The soups get it the worst—a bowl of Schlotzsky's Boston Clam Chowder has 5 grams of trans fat, not to mention 70 percent of your day's sodium. Sure there are plenty of healthy items on this menu, it's just too bad you need a map to find them.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Stay away from fancy, store-branded subs like the Original, Deluxe, and Albuquerque Turkey. Or, if you can't work it out, just order the Chipotle Chicken Sub or the Baby Spinach Salad Pizza.

**55) Smoothie King:** The older and smaller of the two smoothie titans, Smoothie King earns a lower grade than Jamba Juice not by making worse smoothies, but by serving them in cups that are bigger at every size. Unless you ask for a kids' cup, the smallest you'll get is 20 ounces, which makes it that much harder to keep escalating sugar calories under the lid. To partially compensate for the portion distortion, Smoothie King offers to cut out the turbinado sugar that sweetens most of its smoothies, which eliminates up to 100 empty calories. We have an even better idea: Why not remove the sugar entirely from the menu? Isn't fruit sweet enough? For now, just makes sure you ask for it to be made skinny.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Favor the Stay Healthy and Trim Down portions of the menu, and be sure to stick to 20-oz. smoothies. No matter what you do, avoid anything listed under Indulge, or anything with the word Hulk in the name.

**56) Sonic:** By keeping all its burgers at less than 1,000 calories, Sonic manages a rare accomplishment in the fast-food world. But it does so just barely, and it more than makes up for it by offering no reprieve for the fat-loaded fries, tots, and onion rings that litter its menu of side items. And if you settle on a shake to wash down your lunch, you probably just doubled your caloric intake. Perhaps it's best to view Sonic as a quick-stop snack shop, because full-on meals can be dangerous.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The Jr. Banana Split makes an awesome treat with only 180 calories. Besides that, there are a couple staples that you should remember: the Jr. Burger, the Grilled Chicken Wrap, and the Grilled Chicken on Ciabatta.

**57) Starbucks:** Starbucks' signature line of drinks typically involve injecting espresso with massive loads of sugary syrup and milk, ingredients that push their beverages to upwards of 650 calories. Drink one of those alongside a bulging bran muffin, and your afternoon snack just crossed the 1,000-calorie threshold. That being said, there's an aura of change emanating from the Starbuck camp. Slow moving as it is, Starbucks is heading toward a more nutritious menu that includes items such as oatmeal and fruit-and-nut bars, specialty drinks made with skim milk, and in-store pamphlets instructing customers on how to cut fat and sugar from their favorite drinks. More improvements are scheduled for 2009, so we'll keep you posted.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** There's no beating a regular cup of joe or unsweetened tea, but if your jonesing for something a little more indulgent, stick with skim milk, sugar-free syrup, and no whipped cream. As for food,

start your day with so-called Perfect Oatmeal or a Spinach, Roasted Tomato, Feta & Egg Wrap, and try a Fruit Stella for a midday snack.

**58) Subway:** A menu based on lean protein and vegetables is always going to score well in our book. With more than half a dozen sandwiches under 300 calories, plus a slew of soups and healthy sides to boot, Subway can satisfy even the pickiest eater without breaking the caloric bank. But, despite what Jared may want you to believe, Subway is not nutritionally infallible: Those rosy calorie counts posted on the menu boards include neither cheese nor mayo (add 160 calories per 6-inch sub), and some of the toasted subs, like the Meatball Marinara, contain hefty doses of calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Cornell researchers have discovered a “health halo” at Subway, which refers to the tendency to reward yourself or your kid with chips, cookies, and large soft drinks because the entrée is healthy. Avoid the halo, and all will be well.

**59) T.G.I.Friday's:** We salute Friday's for one thing and one thing only, and that's their smaller portions menu. The option to eat smaller plates ought to be the new model to dethrone the dogmatic bigger-is-better principle that dominates chain restaurants. But no matter how small they shrink the entrees, we're still forced to fail this chain due to their strict policy of nutritional secrecy.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** We realized just how dangerous Friday's menu was when a NYC ordinance forced them to cough up the numbers on their caloric bombs. Our advice: Stick to either their smaller portions menu or check out the Lighter Side of Fridays menu, which promises to find you meals with around 500 calories apiece.

**60) Taco Bell:** Taco Bell combines two things with bad nutritional reputations: Mexican food and fast food. The result should be horrendous, yet somehow it works out so that a little prudence at the ordering window can bag you a meal with fewer than 500 calories. The potential for belly-building is still there, but the calorie bombs are generally easy to spot. And to limit the chances of a mistake, Taco Bell reengineered some of its classic items and listed them under the Fresco Menu for a savings of up to 10 grams of fat per item.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** Grilled Stuft Burritos, anything served in a bowl, and anything prepared with multiple “layers” are your worst options. Instead, order any combination of two of the following: crunchy tacos, bean burritos, or anything on the Fresco menu.

**61) Uno Chicago Grill:** Uno has a number of serious strikes against it: The chain invented the deep-dish pizza, they encouraged gluttony with their one-time Bigger and Better menu, and in 1997 they faced false-advertising charges for erroneously claiming that some of their pizzas were low in fat. They've reigned in some of the more conspicuous health violations and have increased nutritional transparency at all of their stores, but from appetizers to desserts, this menu is still riddled with belt-busting loads of fat.

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** First off, cast aside the unruly breadstick that Uno tries to sneak onto most plates. Next, be sure to stick with flatbread over deep-dish pizzas—it could save you more than 1,000 calories in a sitting. Beyond that, stick to soups or entree items served with Mango Salsa.

**62) Wendy's:** Scoring a decent meal at Wendy's is just about as easy as scoring a bad one, and that's a big compliment for a burger joint. Options such as chili and baked potatoes offer the side-order variety that's missing from less-evolved fast-food chains like Dairy Queen and Carl's Jr. Plus they offer a handful of Jr. Burgers that don't stray far over 300 calories. And for our money, the ¼-lb single is one of the best substantial burgers in the industry. Where they err is in their recently expanded line of desserts and a lackluster selection of beverages. But you're happy just drinking water, right?

**SURVIVAL STRATEGY:** The grilled chicken sandwiches and wraps don't have more than 320 calories, which is less than even a small order of French fries. Choose the chicken or a small burger and pair it with a healthy side, and then hit the door before you receive the 500-calorie penalty for giving in to your Frosty hankering.