Five Guys has more than 550 locations in 35 states. And the chain is growing...as are, no doubt, many of its patrons.

Five Guys sells only a handful of items—burgers, fries, hot dogs, Coke (with free refills!), bottled water, and a veggie or grilled cheese sandwich, presumably for the clueless non-meat eater who wanders in.

It’s a meat-and-potatoes place...the kind of retro joint where you can quickly pack in a pile of calories from meat, cheese, white flour, white potatoes, oil, and sugar.

Take the Five Guys Hamburger. Its 700 calories (with no toppings) makes a Big Mac (540 calories) or a Quarter Pounder (410 calories) look like kids food. And the McDonald’s numbers include the burgers’ fixin’s. A Five Guys Bacon Cheeseburger has 920 calories and 30 grams of saturated fat (1 1/2 days’ worth) without toppings. Think two Quarter Pounders.

And how many Five Guys patrons eat a burger without fries or a drink? Add 620 calories for the regular fries or 1,460 calories for a large. (The large is as big as three large orders of fries at McDonald’s.) Now your lunch of an unadorned Bacon Cheeseburger and large fries is up to 2,380 calories. Add 100 calories for every plop of mayo on your burger, another 300 for a large (32 oz.) Coke, and 300 more for every free refill.

Five Guys may be a hip place to go for a burger, fries, and a Coke. But it’s no friend to your hips.

With two out of three adults—and one out of three children—overweight or obese, you’d think that restaurants would have some interest in keeping their patrons alive and dining out longer.

With mandatory calorie labeling on the horizon for chain restaurants, you’d think that restaurants would be dropping high-calorie items from their menus.

With close to 30 percent of young Americans too heavy to join the military, you’d think that restaurants would at least stop introducing new heavyweight items.

Nope. It’s business as usual in the restaurant industry. And that means it’s business as usual around here. Welcome to our 2010 Xtreme Eating Awards.

Information compiled by Melissa Pryputniewicz and Danielle Hazard.
Sneaky Pizza

At California Pizza Kitchen you might expect to find light, vegetable-rich dishes for health-conscious folks. And the Tostada Pizza seems to fit that mold, with its “Southwestern black beans, Cheddar and Monterey Jack cheeses topped with chilled shredded lettuce, homemade roasted tomato salsa, fresh green onions and crispy tortilla strips with our homemade herb ranch dressing.” Yet even without the optional steak or chicken topping, the (individual-size) Tostada Pizza brings 1,440 calories and more than a day’s saturated fat (27 grams) and sodium (2,630 mg) to each diner. The crust alone supplies some 400 calories’ worth of flour (about 1 cup).

With grilled steak the pizza has 1,680 calories, 32 grams of sat fat, and 3,300 mg of sodium. That’s about as much sat fat as you’d get in a Mushroom Pepperoni Sausage Pizza (31 grams), a Cheeseburger Pizza with bacon (32 grams), or a Meat Cravers Pizza (33 grams). But at least they sound heavy.

The Tostada Pizza is sneak-up-on-you heavy.

Double Your Measure…

Americans love noodle dishes from Chinese restaurants. Yet most people would be surprised to hear that their chicken or beef lo mein packs 800 calories and their combo lo mein (with beef, pork, chicken, and shrimp) hits 1,000 calories.

But P.F. Chang’s doesn’t stop there. To make the chain’s Double Pan-Fried Noodles Combo, Chang’s chefs fry the lo mein noodles enough to make them hard and crunchy...while you end up soft and flabby.

It’s always possible that you’re stopping at Chang’s before starting a 3-hour bicycle ride or 4½-hour hike. But on the off chance that you’re not going to burn off the dish’s 1,820 calories after dinner, you’re going to need some place to store them. How does your belly sound?

Speaking of excess, the Double Pan-Fried Noodles Combo delivers an off-the-charts 7,690 milligrams of sodium. That’s 3 teaspoons of salt—a five-day supply, and double the outrageous levels in Chang’s lo meins.

Carbo-loaded

“Spaghettini with Smoked Bacon, Green Peas, and a Garlic-Parmesan Cream Sauce.” That’s how The Cheesecake Factory describes its Pasta Carbonara, which you can get with or without chicken.

Okay, bacon and cream are red flags. But how bad could a pasta dish be? A Cheesecake Factory Grilled Rib-Eye Steak with French fries and onion rings plus a slice of Tiramisu Cheesecake would set you back roughly 2,500 calories and 60 grams of saturated fat. A serving of Pasta Carbonara with Chicken has 2,500 calories and 85 grams of sat fat (more than a four-day supply).

If you fail to soak up every drop of the cream sauce with your complimentary bread, you may end up with only, say, three days’ worth of sat fat coating your four cups of white-flour pasta. Ready for dessert?

Mary had a Lotta Lamb

“A rack of tasty New Zealand lamb (cooked to order) with a rich Cabernet wine sauce,” says Outback’s menu. “Served with garlic mashed potatoes and fresh seasonal veggies.” That sounds downright sensible...until you look at the numbers. The lamb sans sides has 1,300 calories and 60 grams of saturated fat. Some of it comes from the butter in the wine sauce. The rest comes from the rack, which is equal to about eight lamb chops. Still sound sensible? Butter’s everywhere at Outback. It’s in the veggies (or they wouldn’t have 7 grams of sat fat) and it’s in the garlic mashed potatoes (13 grams). Salt shakers must be everywhere too. The lamb packs nearly a day’s worth of sodium (1,340 mg), and the mashed potatoes don’t have all that much less (1,060 mg).

The total damage from the lamb-plus-sides: 1,820 calories, 80 grams of sat fat, and 2,600 mg of sodium. If you’re on a diet, consider Outback’s 16 oz. Prime Rib instead. With the same sides, it’s a steal at “only” 1,580 calories, 57 grams of sat fat, and 2,240 mg of sodium.
“Succulent blue crab and shrimp with roasted corn in spicy habanero-pesto cream sauce with melted cheeses in warm flour tortillas,” says Chevys’ menu.

Yes, there’s some crab and shrimp buried in the chain’s Crab & Shrimp Quesadilla. But you mostly get Frisbee-size white-flour tortillas stuffed with cheese and cream sauce and topped with guacamole and sour cream. They look so innocent, but the platter packs 1,790 calories and 63 grams of saturated fat plus 3,440 mg of sodium. Ay caramba!

Those numbers make the Crab & Shrimp Quesadilla more damaging than any other Chevys quesadilla, including the Fresh Mex pork Carnitas & 3-cheese (1,650 calories and 48 grams of saturated fat).

In fact, they’re more damaging than any fajitas, enchiladas, tacos, or burritos on Chevys’ menu. They’re a quesadoozy.


What harm could a plate of pasta with pesto do, even if you add the optional chicken and/or shrimp? Pesto is made largely of fresh basil and olive oil, with some Parmesan cheese and pine nuts. It’s not as though you’re having spaghetti with meatballs, for goodness sakes.

It’s worse. California Pizza Kitchen’s Pesto Cream Penne—before you add any chicken or shrimp—hides 1,350 calories, 49 grams of saturated fat, and 1,920 mg of sodium. That’s essentially what you’d get in a plate of fettuccine Alfredo, which we dubbed a “heart attack on a plate” in 1994.

Olive Garden’s Fettuccine Alfredo is actually lower in calories (1,220) and sodium (1,350 mg) than California Pizza Kitchen’s Pesto Cream Penne. So is Olive Garden’s Spaghetti & Meatballs (1,110 calories and “only” 20 grams—a day’s worth—of saturated fat).

The truth is that pasta is a calorie magnet for sauces and toppings. At California Pizza Kitchen, it’s tough to find a pasta dish with fewer than 900 calories. (One exception: the Portobello Mushroom Ravioli topped with tomatoes, basil, and garlic has 720.) Some of CPK’s pastas reach 1,500 calories, many of them from white flour, which goes well with the white flour in the platter of complimentary bread. Welcome to corporate California cuisine.

“You’ve never had hotcakes like these!” says Bob Evans’ menu. “We take two stuffed hotcakes, stack them with vanilla cream cheese, add more delicious toppings, then finish with whipped topping and a sprinkling of powdered sugar.”

Oh sure, he’ll happily sell you a stack of three ordinary hotcakes that will add around 1,000 calories’ worth of white flour to your midsection, with a bonus 3 to 9 grams of trans fat (1½ to 4½ days’ worth) and 6 to 12 grams of saturated fat for your heart. (The menu says that Bob’s cooking oil has 0 grams of trans fat. Too bad his hotcake mix is loaded with the stuff.)

And you can pump up the calories on your own by adding syrup (every ¼ cup—just 4 tablespoonfuls—adds 200 calories).

But Bob wants to give his customers more. So he takes two pancakes and stuffs them with either good stuff (like blueberries or bananas) or garbage (like cinnamon chips made of sugar and oil). Then comes a layer of vanilla cream cheese (it’s more like cream than cheese) and a sugary topping (like cinnamon cream), with whipped topping as the coup de grace. Voila! Bob Evans Cinnamon Cream Stacked & Stuffed Hotcakes.

That bumps up the calories to 1,380, the bad fat to 27 grams of saturated plus 7 grams of trans, and the sugar to 27 teaspoons. Too bad Bob can’t squeeze some more calories in. You know, like a Twinkie & Oreo Stacked & Stuffed. Or how about a Pepperoni & Cheese?