The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), founded in 1971, is an independent nonprofit consumer health group. CSPI advocates honest food labeling and advertising, safer and more nutritious foods, and pro-health alcohol policies. CSPI’s work is supported by Nutrition Action Healthletter subscribers and foundation grants. CSPI accepts no government or industry funding.

Nutrition Action Healthletter, first published in 1974, accepts no advertising.

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**BEST BISTRO**

It’s tough to find decent frozen dinners. Most are salt-heavy and whole-grain-poor. And their ingredient lists often look like a year’s worth of leftovers from your 8th grade chemistry lab.

Not Organic Bistro Whole Life Meals. The line of eight dinners ranges from 65 to 430 milligrams of sodium...and you can pronounce the ingredients on the first try.

Take the delicious Chicken Citron (lemon chicken over spinach with herbed quinoa & sundried tomato edamame). It’s mostly edamame (green soybeans), chicken, quinoa, water, spinach, carrots, and sundried tomatoes.

You get 35 grams of protein, 8 grams of fiber, 25 percent of a day’s magnesium, 14 percent of a day’s potassium, plus vitamins A and C, iron, and calcium, all for just 2½ grams of saturated fat and 430 mg of sodium. Not too shabby for a 450-calorie meal.

The Savory Turkey (turkey breast in rosemary mushroom sauce with green beans & lentil-quinoa pilaf), with just 240 mg of sodium, may be the closest you can get to Thanksgiving dinner in the freezer case. And the Wild Salmon (in rosemary orange glaze with cranberry pilaf & broccoli) has no salt added. (You could even add a pinch to the 65 mg that occurs naturally and still end up rock-bottom low.)

Only one variety—the Alaskan Salmon Cake—didn’t pass our taste test.

You may have to visit a store like Whole Foods to find Organic Bistro. But organic veggies, whole grains, less salt, and real food packed in recycled paperboard may be worth the trip.

**FRY, BABY, FRY**

“Parmesan-breaded lasagna pieces, fried and served over alfredo sauce, topped with parmesan cheese and marinara sauce.” That’s how Olive Garden’s menu describes its Lasagna Fritta.

That’s right. Fried lasagna. And just in the nick of time.

Many patrons were probably getting bored with some of Olive Garden’s other appetizers, like Fried Zucchini, Fried Mozzarella, and (fried) Calamari. The Cheesecake Factory fries macaroni and cheese. Hooters fries pickles. Surely, Olive Garden could find something else to fry.

Deep-fat frying is a sure thing. It turns an old standby into a NEW! menu item. And it has guaranteed taste appeal, even without extras like alfredo sauce. Voilà! A bestseller.

So what if a platter of Lasagna Fritta has 1,030 calories—more than any other appetizer on the menu except the Calamari (1,190 calories with the Parmesan-Peppercorn Sauce) or Chicken Alfredo Pizza (1,180 calories)? So what if the Lasagna has a day’s worth of saturated fat (21 grams) and sodium (1,590 milligrams)?

Odds are, you’ll split the appetizer with someone else. So you’ll have plenty of room for the chain’s complimentary breadsticks (150 calories a pop) and the 1,000+ calories in your entrée. After all, you can always build new fat cells to hold the excess. It’s easy.

You can do it while you’re driving home, watching TV, or checking your e-mail. Who says you can’t multi-task?

**The Best Bulgur**

Toss 3 cups of cooked, cooled bulgur with 1 cup each of chopped cherry tomatoes, cucumber, and green pepper, ½ cup of crumbled feta cheese, and ¼ cup of diced red onion. Dress with 3 Tbs. of extra-virgin olive oil, 2 Tbs. of lemon juice, and black pepper.

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Photos: Stephen Schmidt (left), CSPI (right).