



# TREME EATING 2011

## Big eats...big Americans

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

Let's get one thing clear: Restaurants have nothing to do with the nation's obesity epidemic. It's not their fault that two out of three adults and one out of three children are either overweight or obese.

True, a typical restaurant entrée (without an appetizer or dessert) has 1,000 calories. And doozies like these dishes range from 1,200 to 2,500 calories, according to the chains' own numbers. But no one's forcing us to order them.

Look at it this way: Some diners may *want* to put on extra weight, boost their blood pressure, and bump up their LDL ("bad") cholesterol. Restaurants are just there to help.

Information compiled by Melissa Pryputniewicz.



## Code Red

Remember when a slice of cheesecake was a modest wedge about an inch-or-so high? **The Cheesecake Factory Ultimate Red Velvet Cake Cheesecake** has one of those wedges. In fact, it has *two*. They alternate with two wedges of red velvet cake, each of which probably contains a cupcake's worth of cake.

So now you're up to two slices of cheesecake plus two cupcakes...plus cream cheese frosting plus white chocolate shavings plus a small silo of whipped cream. Plus sizes are just a step away!

Each hefty slice (the ones we bought averaged close to three-quarters of a pound) brings 1,540 calories and 59 grams of saturated fat (three days' worth) to your dessert plate. That's impressive, even for The Cheesecake Factory. Only the Reese's Peanut Butter Chocolate Cake Cheesecake has more calories (1,610), though its sat fat falls 18 grams short of the Ultimate's.

It would take two servings of the restaurant's generous Original Cheesecake to equal one Ultimate Red Velvet. An entire tub (1½ quarts) of Breyers All Natural Homemade Vanilla ice cream has 1,680 calories and 60 grams of sat fat, for heaven's sake.

Whose fat cells have room for 1,540 calories *after* dinner? They oughta rename the place The Cheesecake Fattory.

## Built-In Bacon

"Hickory-smoked bacon is blended right into the beef to make our burgers juicy and delicious with bacon flavor in every bite." That's how **IHOP** describes its new line of Bacon 'N Beef Burgers.

Finally. A chain has figured out how to help its patrons eat more food with less chewing. Why bother slapping bacon slabs *on top* of your burger, when you can grind them right *into* the meat? Makes 'em go down nice and smooth.

And that makes it easier for you to swallow the **Monster Bacon 'N Beef Cheeseburger**, which delivers not one, but "two thick, juicy, Bacon 'N Beef burger patties smothered with American and Provolone cheeses on a Romano-Parmesan bun." How thoughtful. *One* thick, juicy, bacon-infused burger would almost certainly leave you hungry in a few hours.

The tab: 1,250 calories and two days' worth of saturated fat (42 grams), with a bonus 1,590 milligrams of sodium (a day's supply, thanks in part to the bacon). And don't forget the sides, which range from fresh fruit (80 calories) to onion rings (620 calories). That leaves seasoned fries (300 calories) somewhere in the middle, which is where your Monster Bacon 'N Beef Burger will likely make its future home.





## Meltdown

“Four fried mozzarella sticks and melted American cheese grilled between two slices of sourdough bread.” That’s how **Denny’s** menu describes its **Fried Cheese Melt**, which is “served with wavy-cut French fries and a side of marinara sauce.”

It’s “grilled cheese with a twist,” says Denny’s. Sure sounds like “the same old cheese and bread repackaged into a new sandwich” to us. What’s next? A Cheese Nachos sandwich? A Cheese Fries Melt? (A fries melt might be a tough sell with a side of fries, but you never know.)

There’s a simple elegance to a dish like the Fried Cheese Melt: mozzarella cheese sticks coated with breading, embedded in melted cheese, and served between two slices of white bread toast with tomato sauce on the side.

It’s as elegant as 1,260 calories (mostly from the fries and the refined carbs in the bread and breading), plus enough cheese to supply 21 grams of saturated fat (a day’s worth). And don’t forget the two days’ sodium (3,010 milligrams).

All for just \$4. “The possibilities are wide open,” says Denny’s Web site. They’re wide, all right.

## Belly Burger

It’s not easy to make your burger stand out these days. Adding cheese, onion rings, or an extra burger are old tricks.

You’ve got to be creative, like **The Cheesecake Factory**. Its **Farmhouse Cheeseburger** is “topped with grilled smoked pork belly, cheddar cheese, onions, lettuce, tomato, mayo and a fried egg.” (Get it? You’d find the egg in a farmhouse and the big-bellied pig in a pen nearby.)

The Cheesecake Factory isn’t the first chain to slap an egg on a burger. Red Robin calls its Royal Red Robin Burger “the aristocrat of all burgers because we crown it with a fresh fried egg.” IHOP’s Bacon ‘N Beef Bacon & Egg Cheeseburger includes “one egg over medium.” And you can get Denny’s Bacon Slamburger with an “egg cooked to order.”

But the pork belly—thick slabs of bacon—helps make those bacon burgers look skimpy. The Farmhouse brings 1,530 calories and 36 grams of saturated fat seasoned with 3,210 milligrams of sodium to your insides. And that’s without the 460 calories and 1,460 mg of sodium in the fries.

Suggested tag line: From our pork belly to yours.



## Shakedown

“Your Health—Just as Important as Taste,” says the hard-to-find “Nutritional Information & Ingredients” page on the **Cold Stone Creamery** Web site.

That’s a comfort, since the chain is all about the “Ultimate Ice Cream Experience.” It’s “the place to indulge your ice cream dreams.”

Take the Founder’s Favorite Signature Creation—ice cream, pecans, brownie, fudge, and caramel. A large (“Gotta Have It”) in a chocolate-dipped waffle cone or bowl has 1,590 calories and 42 grams of saturated fat.

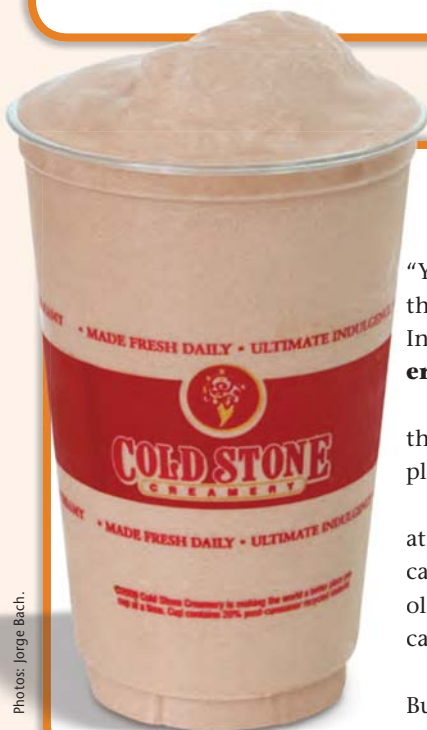
Clearly, health is Cold Stone’s No. 1 priority. But the chain’s ice cream shakes take health to

a new level. A “Gotta Have It” **PB&C Shake** (peanut butter, chocolate, and milk), for example, squeezes a full day’s calories (2,010) and 3½ days’ worth of sat fat (68 grams) into each 24 fl. oz. plastic cup.

Granted, that doesn’t sound so healthy, what with so many adults and children either overweight or obese. But what about those who *aren’t*? Their fat cells and artery linings may not yet be packed solid. And don’t forget the underweight.

Don’t worry. Cold Stone’s got them covered. Even a 16 fl. oz. small (“Like It”) PB&C Shake has 1,280 calories.

See? Cold Stone cares.





## Getting Stuffed

“Provolone cheese-stuffed meatballs braised in a rich marinara sauce with a hint of crushed red pepper, layered over tender fettuccine pasta lightly blended with Parmesan cream sauce,” croons **Applebee’s** menu.

Lightly? The menu shouldn’t print that word within a six-inch radius of the chain’s **Provolone-Stuffed Meatballs With Fettuccine**.

Each serving of pasta (four cups at the Applebee’s we visited) plus garlic bread harbors 1,520 calories and 43 grams of saturated fat (two days’ worth), with a side of 1½ teaspoons

of sodium (3,700 milligrams). It’s like eating two of Applebee’s 12 oz. Ribeye Steaks plus a side of Garlic Mashed Potatoes. Yum.

Your waistline and arteries may want to know why pasta needs both a marinara *and* a Parmesan cream sauce. Way back in the pre-obesity-epidemic 1970s, pasta came dressed with a single sauce. And meatballs needed no cheese stuffing.

But that was before the dairy industry started a campaign to get restaurants to work more cheese into their menus. Whether the dairy pushers urged Applebee’s to stuff its meatballs with cheese, we don’t know. But once customers get used to seeing cheese on sandwiches, salads, soups, and pastas, restaurants may not need any prompting to cheese-up even more dishes.

At some Applebee’s, for example, you can get the provolone-stuffed meatballs in a Stuffed Meatball Sandwich (1,090 calories, 28 grams of sat fat, 3,540 mg of sodium). And you can add chili cheese fries on the side for an extra dollar or two (plus an extra 550 calories, 11 grams of sat fat, and 1,500 mg of sodium).

Nice.



## King Wrong

According to **Great Steak**, an extra-large order of Great Fries weighs roughly 1½ pounds and delivers 930 calories and 2,490 milligrams of sodium to hips, bellies, and blood vessels that probably have too much of both.

But that’s not enough for the Great Steak folks. Not when they can sell Great Fries topped with Philly Cheese (Cheese Fries), or with Philly Cheese and chili (Coney Island Fries), or with Philly Cheese and jalapeño peppers (Nacho Fries), or, last but nowhere near least, with Philly Whiz, chopped bacon, and sour cream & chives (**King Fries**).

An extra-large King Fries (which isn’t available at all locations) dispatches 1,500 calories to your overcrowded fat depots and 4,980 mg of sodium (more than three days’ worth) to your rapidly aging blood vessels. And all that cheese, bacon, and sour cream makes sure that the saturated fat reaches 33 grams. It’s like eating three McDonald’s Quarter Pounders with Cheese sprinkled with two-thirds of a teaspoon of salt.

Nothing like a light snack at the mall.

## Steak Out

Nothing about **Morton’s** (“The Steakhouse”) looks extreme. It’s a staid, pricey venue for a business lunch or special dinner.

But Morton’s menu is a minefield of extremes. Take the **Porterhouse Steak**, a classic hunk of aged prime beef that weighs 24 ounces before cooking. It’s a 1,390-calorie addition to your mainframe that comes with 36 grams of saturated fat seasoned with 1,200 milligrams of sodium, but no sides. (What do you expect for just \$55 or \$60?)

A side of, say, **Mashed Potatoes** adds 850 calories, 34 grams of sat fat, and 1,300 mg of sodium. And half of Morton’s renowned **Creamed Spinach**—the side serves two—tosses in 330 calories plus 15 grams of sat fat and 460 mg of sodium.

Your grand total: 2,570 calories, 85 grams of sat fat, and 2,980 mg of sodium...not counting the complimentary bread and butter. That’s the calories of eight pieces of Original Recipe chicken plus mashed potatoes and gravy, coleslaw, and four biscuits at KFC, with an extra 1½ days’ sat fat on the side.

That’s giving *you* the business. 🍴



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 and safer and more nutritious foods. 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.

For information about CSPI's national Food Day, October 24, go to [www.FoodDay.org](http://www.FoodDay.org)

## RIGHT STUFF

### COOL SLAW



Cole slaw is a classic. It goes with just about anything that comes off the barbecue. That mix of cool, crunchy, and creamy is the perfect foil for something hot and smoky or spicy.

But cole slaw, which comes from the Dutch word "koolsla" (cabbage salad), doesn't need all that kool. Just ask **Dole**, **Mann's**, and other salad-in-a-bag makers.

The broccoli stalks that go into **Broccoli Slaw** (Mann's calls it **Broccoli Cole Slaw**) aren't quite as nutrient-packed as the florets, but they're an excellent source of vitamins A and C, folate, potassium, and fiber, all for just 25 calories in each quarter-bag (1-cup) serving.

Preparation couldn't be easier: dump into a bowl and pick a dressing. Half a cup of almost any ranch, poppyseed, thousand island, or slaw dressing by Marie's, Cindy's, or Annie's should be enough for the whole bag. Or make your own dressing. For a classic flavor, mix ½ cup mayo, 1 Tbs. mustard, 1 Tbs. cider vinegar, and ½ tsp. celery seed. Or try ¼ cup mayo, 1 Tbs. reduced-sodium teriyaki sauce, and 1 Tbs. cider vinegar for an Asian twist.

Or stir-fry the slaw in 1 Tbs. peanut oil in a very hot skillet until well browned. Remove the slaw and stir-fry some cubes of extra-firm tofu or chicken in 1 Tbs. peanut oil until lightly browned. Stir in ¼ cup SoyVay Veri Veri Teriyaki or your own favorite lower-sodium stir-fry sauce. Return the slaw to the pan and serve with brown rice.

It's veggie easy.

**Dole:** (800) 356-3111

## FOOD PORN

### 330 MAGNUM



**Magnum** is the world's top-selling ice cream bar. But until April, it wasn't available in the world's biggest ice cream market.

Consumer-products giant Unilever (which also owns Ben & Jerry's, Breyers, Good Humor, Klondike, and Popsicle) is pulling out the big guns—starting with a \$10 million ad campaign—to let us know that, "At long last—Magnum, the international ice cream sensation made with thick Belgian chocolate, has arrived in the U.S."

Just in time. Because Americans could really use a new line of six premium ice cream bars whose chocolate coating is "so incredibly thick it cracks when you bite."

Take the **Magnum Double Caramel**, which manages to affix 330 calories and 14 grams of saturated fat to a stick. How? By covering vanilla bean ice cream with a "chocolatey coating" (mostly coconut oil and sugar) and a caramel sauce (mostly water, sugar, corn syrup, skim milk powder, and coconut oil), before coating the bar with a thick Belgian milk chocolate shell.

Unilever isn't trying to steal customers away from Dove and Häagen-Dazs, the company told *The Wall Street Journal*. Magnum's entry should "at least double the size of the market for super-premium ice cream novelties," noted a company spokesperson.

If Magnum bars take off here, the market won't be the only thing whose size you can expect to double.

**Unilever:** (800) 634-7532

## dish OF THE MONTH

### 60-Second Salad Dressing

Whisk 2 Tbs. regular mayonnaise with 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar, 1 Tbs. orange juice, and ½ tsp. salt. Toss with 8 cups of salad greens and top with 2 cups of chopped vegetables—try bell pepper, carrot, celery, cucumber, tomato, and avocado.