



# Restaurant Dining by Design

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**We can make our home slim by design**, but that's only one place we eat. Half of us eat half our meals in restaurants. We can control our own home, but we can't control our favorite restaurant, right? Wrong. We can change what *we* do, and we can ask them to change what *they* do.

Nobody goes to a restaurant to start a diet--they go there to enjoy themselves. But small changes can let us enjoy ourselves and still eat less without resorting to an alfalfa and yak cheese salad. For instance, take our Restaurant Rule of Two--you can order any entrée you want, but you can only have two additional items with it. That could be an appetizer and piece of bread, or a glass of wine and a dessert, or two pieces of bread – you just can't have it all. People choose what they want most, they still enjoy themselves, and they report to us that they eat about a quarter less. There are a lot of easy tricks you can use to eat better at restaurants.

There are also a lot of easy tricks restaurants can do to help you eat better. Why would they bother? It's simple: They make a lot of money off of you, and that money disappears when you choose to eat somewhere else. You just need to know what to ask for and how to ask them. There's a one-liner about a waitress in a greasy spoon diner who comes to the table with a full tray of coffee and asks, "Who asked for the coffee in a clean cup?" If we know what to ask our favorite restaurants to do for us, we're likely to do it. If we don't ask, we have to be resigned to the dirty cup, or whatever they give us.

## In Praise of Leftovers

**Let's start with leftovers.** Next time you're at a restaurant, start by thinking about the food you should take home. People have mixed feelings--mostly negative--about to-go boxes or doggie bags. "Doggie bag" sounds especially negative--like the sometimes-not-so-empty plastic bags people carry when walking their pooch. Only about 18 percent of dinner diners will even ask for to-go boxes after their meal.<sup>i</sup> After all, Styrofoam boxes don't accessorize well in the symphony lobby, they make you look cheap in front of your swoony hot date, and if you ask for one in France they'll deport you to the United States even if you're not American. Still, a lot of us would be better off if we saved part of that burrito-as-big-as-your-head for tomorrow instead of regretfully eating it all at once.

Aside from the doggie bag visual and looking like a cheap date, there's a Nobel Prize-winning explanation of why we don't ask for to-go boxes. It's called the endowment effect, which means that we value things more if we feel we "own" them than if we don't, according to researchers like Daniel Kahneman, Richard Thaler, Cass Sunstein, and Dan Ariely.<sup>ii</sup> Before we order food, we don't own it. But once we order our food, we psychologically "own" it. It's harder to pry it away from us--even with a to-go box. But if a restaurant could get us to think in terms of eating half and saving the rest, we might order an appetizer, a salad, or an extra drink. In short, we might spend more money. This could be win-win. We might eat fewer calories, and they might make more money.

But how could they get you to take a to-go box? If we get possessive about our food right *after* we order it, maybe they should tell us they have to-go boxes *before* we decide what we're going to order.

We tested this at a restaurant partner of ours in central Illinois that serves \$20-\$25 prix-fixe dinners every Tuesday. It's in a college town and the diners are mostly staff, faculty, and local townfolk who expect to fill out a comment card about the meal at the end of the night. What they don't realize is that every dinner is really an undercover study--we might change the background music and see how fast they eat, or we might give them complimentary free wine but tell them it's from North Dakota and see if it influences how they rate the taste of the food, how long they stay, and whether they come back.<sup>iii</sup>

There's a Nobel Prize-winning reason why we don't ask for to-go boxes.



But during this particular week we focused on how many people would ask for a to-go box. When people arrived and were seated, we had waitresses tell the people at half of the tables, "Our portions are generous. Whatever you order and don't eat, you can take in a to-go box." They were told this *before* they ordered. The people at the other half of the tables were told the exact same thing *after* they ordered, as their meal was set in front of them.



**If restaurants could order for you, they'd probably start you off with that veggie platter or side salad.**

We've also done this a number of times in more tightly controlled situations--where the dinners are a little less suspicious and aren't trying to figure out what's going on. What we usually find is that people who were told about the to-go boxes *before* they order are about 40

percent more likely to say they'll take home leftovers than those who were asked afterward.<sup>iv</sup> Half today, half tomorrow. This was a double-win. People might order more, but they tended to eat less at that sitting. Usually we find that when people eat a little less, they drink a little more, translating into extra sales of overpriced wine and lattes (but still fewer calories).<sup>v</sup>

"Boy, the food at this place is really terrible."  
"Yeah, I know--and such small portions."  
- Annie Hall (1977)

Remember, restaurants don't want to make us fat. They want to make money. This may sound crazy, but many of them make less profit when you order \$4.95 onion rings than when you order the \$4.95 side salad, because it has only 13¢ worth of lettuce in it.<sup>vi</sup> They'd love us to order the cheap-as-dirt salad, but all restaurants--whether it's Fat Boy's Burgers or the French Maiden's Delicatessen--have three goals when it comes to us:

- 1. They want us to eat there and not across the street.**
- 2. They want us to spend a lot on their most profitable foods.**
- 3. They want us to leave happy and to come back often.**

If they could order for you, they'd probably start you off with that veggie platter or side salad. There's a huge profit margin on those foods. But it's just easier for them to convince you to buy the standby favorites, like French fries and Buffalo chicken wings.<sup>vii</sup> In fact, it would be silly for most restaurants to drop their wings and rings from their menu. It's what people *think* they want, so they're highlighted on the menu, they're part of a special, and the wait staff pushes them. They appear consistently on the menus of casual dining restaurants so people don't have an excuse to go across the street.

But it's not the onion rings and French fries that trip us up at our favorite "go to" restaurants. It's what we do in the first 15 minutes after we get there. It looks like this: We arrive without a reservation, and the hostess seats us wherever's most convenient. We listen to the specials, and skim the menu until a couple things catch our eye. We then *imagine* which will taste best, and we proceed to order too much food. While we wait, we tear apart the bread in a way that makes zombies appear well-mannered. After our food arrives and we've picked all the meaty, cheesy, saucy portions clean, we languidly consider dessert.

From the moment we set foot in a particular restaurant, each choice adds calories to our once girlish and boyish figures: Where we sit, where our eyes land on the menu, and how we imagine the food will taste all make us eat worse than we otherwise would. But there are easy things you can do to turn this around, and easy things the restaurant can do to help. Unfortunately, even though the shrimp salad makes more profit than Buffalo wings, most restaurants don't know how to help us order the shrimp salad. Yet the answers are simpler than they might think. They start as soon as we walk in the door.

#### What You Can Do . . .

### HAVE YOUR HALF-PLATE PORTION AND EAT IT, TOO

Your restaurant du jour doesn't offer half-plate portions? If you're feeling bold, ask your server—or the manager—for a half portion for "a reduced price, so I'll have room for an appetizer or drink." It's surprising how often this works—even at the big chain restaurants. If this isn't possible, you can always have them box half of it . . . before it arrives.

But it's best to commit to the to-go bag before you start eating. Here's the plate-size rule of thumb: If *either* the portion or the plate looks big, commit to taking a to-go bag. There's more food there than you think.

## Show Me to a Slim Table

**Restaurants number their tables.** Table 1 might be closest to the door and Table 91 might be farthest. This makes it easy for your server to keep track of orders. The table number also gets printed on the receipt, which also tells what people ordered, when they ordered, and who their server was. For instance, we might know that Table 91 is a large table in the dark back corner of the restaurant, that Sara served twelve people on April 1, and that everyone ordered fish or chicken. With enough receipts from enough restaurants, we can start to see if where you sit relates to what you eat.



We recently visited twenty-seven restaurants across the country, and we measured and mapped out the layout of each one. We knew how far each table or booth was from the window and front door, whether it was in a secluded or well-traveled area, how light or dark it was, and how far it was from the kitchen, bar, restrooms, and TV sets. After we mapped it out and diners began arriving, we were able to track what they ordered and how it related to where they sat.

Some restaurants we visited for only one or two nights, but at one restaurant we collected every receipt for every day for three straight months. At the end of three months, our Restaurant War Room back in Ithaca, New York, looked like a recycling center. It was full of huge bags stuffed with receipts that were wrinkled or wadded, smeared with steak sauce or wine stains, and autographed with things like “Thanks, Tiffany” and smiley faces. By analyzing these A-1-smeared artifacts, we are able to figure out whether somebody at Table 91 way in back was more likely to order salad or less likely to order an extra drink than somebody at Table 7--which is way up front, next to the door and bar.

Are there fat tables in restaurants? This is a bit preliminary, but so far it looks like people order healthier foods if they sat by a window or in a well-lit part of the restaurant, but they ate heavier food and ordered more of it if they sat at a dark table or booth. People sitting farthest from the front door ate the fewest salads and were 73 percent more likely to order dessert. People sitting within two tables of the bar drank an average of 3 more beers or mixed drinks (per table of four) than those sitting one table farther away. The closer a table was to a TV screen, the more fried food a person bought. People sitting at high top bar tables ordered more salads and fewer desserts.



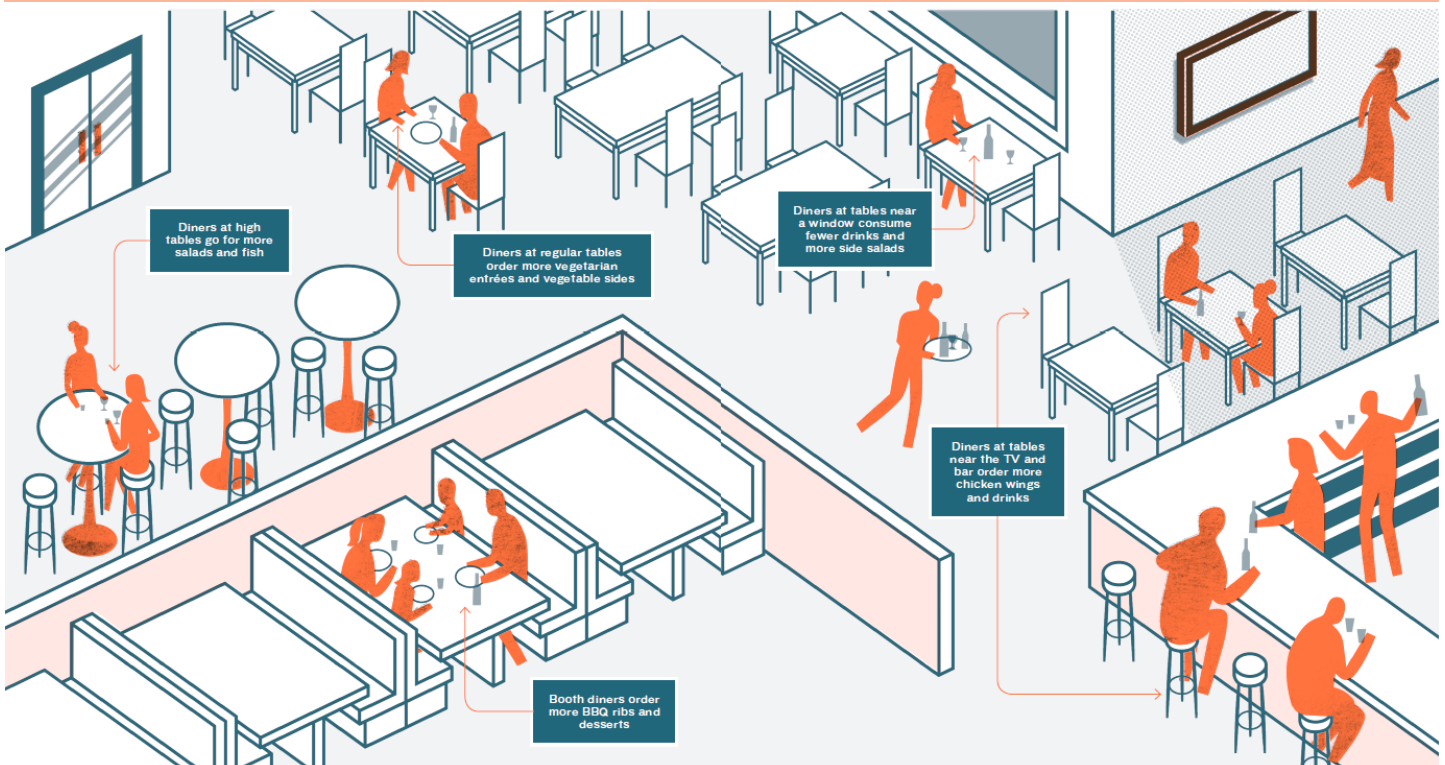
**People sitting farthest from the front door ate the fewest salads and were 73 percent more likely to order dessert.**

Some of this makes sense. The darker it is, the more “invisible” you might feel, or the less easy it is to see how much you’re eating. Seeing the sunlight, people, or trees outside might make you more conscious about how you look, might make you think about walking, or might prime a green salad. Sitting next to the bar might make you think it’s more normal to order that second drink, and watching TV might distract you from thinking twice about what you order. If high top bar tables make it harder to slouch or spread out like you could in a booth, they might cause you to feel in control and to order the same way.

Or this could all just be random speculation. Now, the facts are what they are, but *why* they happen is not always clear.

### RESTAURANTS HAVE SLIM AND HEAVY ZONES

IT MATTERS WHERE YOU SIT!



Does sitting in a dark, quiet booth in the back of the restaurant make you order more dessert? Not necessarily. It might be that heavy dessert-eaters naturally gravitate to those tables, or that a hostess takes them there out of habit. Regardless, we know that lots of extra calories coagulate where it's dark and far from the door.

We have an expression in our Lab: "If you want to be skinny, do what skinny people do." Avoiding the fat tables may be a baby step toward being slim by design. If you want to stack the deck in your favor, think twice about where you sit. Conversely, if a restaurant knows which "skinny tables" will sell more of those high-margin salads and that expensive white wine, they can fill those tables up first, leaving the back tables empty until the onion-ring lovers rise up and demand to be seated.<sup>viii</sup>

We have an expression in our Lab:  
"If you want to be skinny, do what skinny people do."

What You Can Do . . .

## SIT WHERE THE SLIM PEOPLE SIT

Where you sit in a restaurant might relate to what you order.<sup>ix</sup> We don't know that eating at slim tables will make you slim, but you might as well stack the deck in your favor. Here's what kind of seating to look for.

Far from kitchen or bar	Elevated tables
Well-lighted area	Far from TV sets
Near windows	

Either well-lit, elevated tables near windows make you eat better, or people who eat better like to eat at well-lit, elevated tables near windows. But while you're contemplating the causality, the couple next to you just took the last elevated table by the window.

There are easy changes you can make as soon as you arrive at your restaurant, but there are also easy changes restaurant can make to help you eat healthier. If enough people told the manager, "I'd eat here more often if it wasn't so dark and loud and if there weren't all of these annoying TVs," eventually one of the restaurant corners will have more light and less TV.

## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### Fewer Televisions and More Lights

Some people like restaurants with television and loud music. They make the place seem club-like, hip, and energetic. But they're not what *all* people like, and it doesn't make the place very slimming. Fortunately, restaurants can give people both. They can have a quieter, TV-free, strategically lit section for the people who want to talk more and eat less. And they can still keep the Studio 54 section for those who want to talk less and rage more.

## One Antidote for Fast Food Fever

**But before you charge** into a Hardee's to grab that brightly lit table by the window, you need to know that lighting and sound don't work the same way for fast food restaurants. The lights are already so bright and the sound so loud that it jacks you up into gulping down a full meal worth of combo-calories before you know it. Now in nice restaurants, dark corners make us overeat because we relax more, stay longer, and order more drinks and desserts. This isn't a problem in fast food restaurants, because most people eat quickly and leave. No waiter comes by your table every 10 minutes asking if you want anything else to eat or drink. So here was our thinking: Maybe if fast food restaurants dimmed the lights and mellowed the music, it might keep people from wolfing down food like it's their last meal. It might make them notice they were getting fuller faster.

At the time, I was a professor at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois, and my researchers and I would go to the local Hardee's a couple times a week to have lunch and brainstorm new ideas. We knew the Hardee's folks by name and they knew us. We also knew this Hardee's planned to open up a large, sealed-off section that was formerly for smokers. We proposed the following: If they gave us the restaurant for a day, we would convert the sealed-off section into a fine dining room and see whether softening the lighting and music would change how much people ate and how much they liked it. Since local fast food managers can change the music and lighting to whatever they think will sell well, he was game. (It probably also didn't hurt that we'd eaten there about 300 times.)

People at well-lit, elevated tables near windows eat better.







**Head to the darkest, quietest corner after you get your fast-food tray.**

It took the twelve of us only about three hours to black-paper all the windows in the former smoking section, replace the bright florescent lights with soft incandescent ones, and replace rocking Aerosmith and ZZ Top music with the mellow and eternally hip jazz album *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis. When that day's lunch bunch came in and ordered, we ushered half into the original "bright light and loud music" part of the restaurant and the other half into the converted softer lighting and music room--Le Bec Hardee's.

Everyone had basically ordered the same foods with the same calorie content. The only thing that changed was how much they ate and how much they liked it. Those eating in our converted room ate 18 percent less food, and they rated it as tasting a lot better. Miles Davis delivered.<sup>ix</sup>

Softer lights and music slowed diners down, and two things happened. First, their stomach caught up with their brain and they realized they were full. Second, although French fries and bacon cheeseburgers taste great when hot, they taste soggy when not. So what's a fast food eater to do? Head to the darkest, quietest corner after you get your tray.

And there's also some leftover news you can take home with you: Turn down the lights and music--or TV--when you eat dinner at home. Maybe you could even top the evening off by using some Hardee's tray-liners as placemats. "It's a good thing," I imagine Martha Stewart not saying.

## **A Healthy Concession Lesson: Build It and They Will Come**

Some restaurants tell us, "We give people what they want, and they don't want healthy food." Most of these have never really tried to sell any healthy food. And if they've only half-heartedly tried selling one or two things, how would they *know* healthier food wouldn't sell?

Few places in the world have worse food than concession stands at sporting events. All these concessionaires say the same thing, "People only want chili dogs with fries and nachos with Cheez-Wiz, so that's all we sell."

But maybe if they sold healthier food, people would come. To test this, my colleague, Drew Hanks, and I teamed up with Helena Laroche at the University of Iowa's Medical School to do a concession stand makeover in time for high school football season in Muscatine, Iowa--90 miles south of the actual Field of Dreams from the movie.

We made one change: we added ten healthier foods, like chicken breast sandwiches, trail mix, string cheese, carrots with dip, and even big dill pickles. We kept all of the favorites--we just added some new foods.

If you offer it, they *will* come. Within a year, healthy foods were nearly 10 percent of sales, and they kept rising with each game--by the last game, 175 people had even bought pickles.<sup>1</sup> And our surveys showed they were happier, especially parents. We built it, and they came. It's a healthy concession lesson.<sup>1</sup>

## “Can I Take Your Order?”

**When you're handed a menu**, how do you decide what to order? You probably skim over what's listed and screen out things you don't like (the eggplant and puffer fish stir-fry). Then you narrow it down to two or three finalists. You may think you made these choices yourself, but you really didn't. Your finalists were largely biased by the menu's layout.

There's an art and a science to understanding how we read menus. The world's greatest expert at doing this is my friend Gregg Rapp, an urbane but unassuming man who lives high above Palm Springs in an *Architectural Digest*-worthy mid-century home that is Frank Sinatra hip. Gregg's a professional menu engineer. He shows restaurants how to redesign their menus so they guide our eyes to the most profitable items they can sell. But the same principles can be used to help guide our eyes to the healthier foods (which, again, are often the most profitable). Most important, we can use his principles to find hidden healthy treasures and not just settle for the red-boxed, big-type-size listing for the Half-a-Bison Burger we couldn't ignore.

When it comes to what you order for dinner, two things matter most: What you see on the menu and how you imagine it will taste.

### 1. What you see.

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We read menus in a Z-shaped pattern. We start in the top left, move to the top right, go to the middle, veer down to the bottom left, and end up on the bottom right. After that, we look at whatever catches our eye--boxes, bold type, pictures, logos, or icons. Basically, any item that looks different is going to get your attention and make you just a little bit more likely to order it. As Gregg says, if the shrimp salad for \$8.99 is in a regal-looking burgundy font in a lightly shaded gold box and has a little chef's hat icon next to it, even Mr. Magoo wouldn't miss seeing it. He might not buy it, but he'll consider it. He might remind himself that he had shrimp for lunch or is hungrier for beef, but he might also think, *Shrimp salad . . . that sounds good for a change.*

Still, it's a big step from reading the menu to ordering the shrimp salad. What stands in between? Just your imagination. If the words used in the menu lead you to expect this salad will be fresh, flavorful, and filling, you're a lot closer to ordering it than if they made it sound like fishing bait.

### 2. How you imagine it will taste.

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With well-engineered menus, what you *see* isn't a coincidence and what you *imagine* isn't a coincidence. Your imagination is guided. A great menu guides your imagination to build these expectations so you're tasting as you're reading. Again,

it leads you to think the shrimp will be “fresh and flavorful” instead of “live bait.” It can be done in two words.

A few years ago, a staid, sleepy place named Bevier Cafeteria wanted to rebrand itself by offering a bunch of healthy new foods. The problem with healthy foods is that most people don’t want them. They want tasty foods--if they happen to be healthy, that’s great but secondary. My buddy Jim Painter and I reviewed the menu and did nothing more than tweak the names of some of the items, adding a descriptive word here or there: red beans and rice became *traditional Cajun* red beans and rice, seafood fillet became *succulent Italian* seafood fillet, and so on. Not a single thing changed in the recipes themselves--the only difference was two descriptive words.

Not only did foods with the descriptive names sell 27 percent more, they were rated as tastier than those with the plain boring old names.<sup>x</sup> Not only that, but when people ate a food with an “improved” name, they even liked the cafeteria better--rating it as more trendy and up-to-date.<sup>xi</sup> They even rated the chef as having more years of European culinary training. In reality, for all we knew the guy had been fired from Arby’s two months earlier.

# The Cornell Diner



Almost any notation can catch one's eye and increase consideration and choice.

Place healthy high margin items in bold boxes or colored boxes to “call them out.”

Section off House Favorites that are healthy. In any section such as this, make sure the healthier items are listed first.

## House Favorites

### Appetizers

**Crisp Summer Salad with Pineapple and Avocado** 6  
Combine juicy pineapple and fresh, ripe avocado for our lightest and easiest summer salad.

**Chips and Salsa** 7  
Crispy tortilla chips served with homemade salsa and guacamole.

**Soup of the Day** 5  
Please ask your server.

**Boneless Buffalo Wings** 6  
Breaded chicken breast tossed in spicy wing sauce. Served w/ cool bleu cheese dressing.

**Warm Burrata Mozzarella and Grilled Asparagus** 6  
Oven roasted tomato, balsamic syrup, chili flakes, extra virgin olive oil

**Chilli Cheese Fries** 7  
Warm potato wedges topped with melted cheese and our famous chili.

**Light and Fresh Humboldt Fog and Roasted Beet Salad** 6  
Watercress, toasted pistachios, raspberry vinaigrette

**Blade Steak and Harvest Stew** 17  
Tender blade steak served with corn, carrots, mushrooms, potatoes, cauliflower and onions.

**London Broil in Mushroom sauce**  
- Trim portion 7  
- Full portion 10

**Pork Tenderloin, South Island Style with Mixed Cilantro salad** 14  
Delicious and lean pork tenderloin served with chunks of cucumber are splashed with lime juice and sprinkled with cilantro and chili powder.

**Juicy Cheeseburger with Fries** 13  
Traditional American favorite.

**Succulent Italian Seafood Filet with crisp Johnnycake** 16  
Whole, flaky white filets in a crispy batter served with corn meal flatbread.

**Chicken Tenders with Fries** 13  
Strips of chicken hand-battered then breaded and fried to perfection.

**Shrimp Gumbo**  
- Trim portion 11  
- Full portion 15  
Featuring okra, onions, bell pepper and diced tomatoes served over long-grain white rice.

### Sides

**Roasted Vegetables** 3  
Includes carrots, broccoli, squash and potatoes.

**Chef Salad** 3  
Filled with crisp greens, vegetables, hard boiled eggs, meat, and cheese

**Baked Potato** 4  
Filled with sour cream, cheese, chives, bacon bits, and butter.

**Cinnamon Apples** 4  
Apples simmered with sugar and cinnamon

### Happy Endings

**Cheese & Fruit** 5  
3 types of delicious cheese paired with grapes, strawberries, and blueberries.

**Italian Sorbet** 5  
Ancient Italian frozen dessert.

**Chocolate Cake** 6  
Chocolate cake with chocolate frosting paired with cool vanilla ice cream.

Descriptive words for healthy items sell 28% more (than “seafood salad”).

Offer salads as the default. Fries can be substituted.



Place healthy items in the four corners and at the beginning of sections.

Use colored or bolded words to highlight healthy target foods.

Instead of a “Healthy” section, call things “Light and Fresh” or similar taste-related phrases.

For select items, offer 1/2 size portions for 70% the price of full. Don’t call them half size. Use trim, moderate, light, etc.

Use a logo or icon to draw attention to targeted item - beware using “healthy” logos, which can sign bad taste.

And it didn't even matter how ridiculous the names were. We egregiously renamed chocolate cake as Belgian Black Forest Double-Chocolate Cake. This was nasty, dried-out chocolate sheet cake--really sad stuff. Now it doesn't even matter that the Black Forest isn't even in Belgium--when we asked diners what they thought of the cake, some raved about it. One guy went on and on, concluding with, "It reminds me of Antwerp." Where in Antwerp, I wondered, an abandoned food cart at the train station? Adding a couple words changed sales, tastes, and attitudes toward the restaurant. And it even reminded one person of a delusional vacation.

So what kinds of words do restaurants rely on to help make a satisfied sale? We analyzed 373 descriptive menu items from around the country and found four categories of vivid names:<sup>xii</sup>

**1. Sensory names:** Describing the texture, taste, smell, and mouth feel of the menu item raises our taste expectations. Pastry chefs are the masters of these, using evocative names like Velvety Chocolate Mousse, but a great main menu also has Crisp Snow Peas, Pillowy Handmade Gnocchi, Fork-tender Beef Stew

**2. Nostalgic names:** Alluding to the past can trigger happy wholesome associations of tradition, family, and national origin. Think Old-style Manicotti, Oktoberfest Red Cabbage, and Grandma's Chicken Dumplings, or words like Classic or House Favorite.

**3. Geographic names:** Words that create an image or ideology of a geographic area associated with the food. Think Iowa Farm-raised Pork Chops, Southwestern Tex-Mex Salad, Carolina Mustard Barbecue, or Georgia Peach Tart.

**4. Brand names:** Cross-promotions are catching on fast in the chain restaurant world. They tell us, "If you love the brand, you'll love this menu item." That's why we can buy Jack Daniels<sup>®</sup> BBQ Ribs, and Twix<sup>®</sup> Blizzards. For the high-end restaurants, this translates into Niman Ranch pork loin or a Kobe beef kebab.

A smart restaurant owner who wants you to eat his healthy, high-margin foods can engineer his menu so that you see them first, and he can describe them so you taste them in your mind. Unfortunately, he could also engineer his menu for evil purposes to guide toward his most profitable *unhealthy* foods. You can avoid this by decoding some of these seductive names and uncovering the hidden healthy treasures instead.

Most non-chain restaurants don't list their calories, but it's still pretty easy to break their code and figure out whether their special of the day will make you fit or fat. For the past few months we've been tracking the calories on the menus of chain restaurants.

Our research is far from complete, but here are some preliminary rules of thumb. On average, if a restaurant put the word “buttery” in the name of a dish, it will have 102 more calories in it. Anything described with the word “crispy” had 131 more calories than its non-“crispy” counterpart.

But just as there are high-calorie words, there are low-calorie words. Order something that is described as seasoned, roasted, or marinated and you won’t be regretting it on the treadmill. These foods had about 60 calories fewer than their non-seasoned, roasted, or marinated counterpart.

## What You Can Do . . .

### MENU WORDS THAT MAKE US FAT

Menu descriptions sell. But some words are a lot more caloric than others. We matched more than 200 menu descriptions of items from chain restaurants with their calorie content. Here are the most and least caloric words on restaurant menus.<sup>xiii</sup>

HIGH-CALORIE WORDS	LOW-CALORIE WORDS
Buttery	Seasoned
Creamed	Roasted
Crispy/crunchy	Light
Smothered	Fat-free
Alfredo or white sauce	Reduced
Fried/deep-fried/pan-fried	Marinated
Scampi	Fresh
Loaded	Broiled

Other words that didn’t come up in our study--but you should also be on watch for--include “Blubbery” and “911” (on the high-calorie side) and “Doesn’t taste as bad as you’d expect” (on the low-calorie side).

If the description sounds too good to pass up, it might deliver more in calories than the taste is worth.

If you really want to track down the hidden healthy treasures that might be buried in the middle of the menu, just ask your server, “What are your two or three lighter entrées that get the most compliments?” or “What’s the best thing on the menu if a person wants a light dinner?” If nothing catches your interest, you can always make a request. You can ask if you can get a salad with a skirt steak filet on it, or you can ask for a side of vegetables instead of the fries, or you can ask for the pan-fried fish cooked with Pam instead of oil. More often than not, they’ll make what you want—even huge chains like Red Lobster and Ruby Tuesday often make adjustments. Of course, they could also say, “We’re not going to make what you want,” just as you could say, “And I might not be back.”

## Just ask your server, “What are your two or three lighter entrées that get the most compliments?”

If nothing catches your interest, you can always make a request. Of course, they could also say, “We’re not going to make what you want,” just as you could say, “And I might not be back.”

## Half-Plate Profits

**There's a Mexican restaurant** in the Midwest that boasts “Burritos as Big as Your Head.” If the United Nations had guidelines about what not to eat, this would be in the top three:

1. **Don't eat things on fire.**
2. **Don't eat things that are moving.**
3. **Don't eat things as big as your head.**

Why are restaurant portions so huge? Restaurants think that the more food--the more calories per dollar--they give us, the more likely we'll eat there and not across the street. But this can backfire if they go too far. When burritos become as big as your head, reasonable people either split one or they don't buy any side dishes or desserts. Either outcome is bad for the restaurant. They win the Largest Entrée Award but not the Largest Check-size Award.

But they could avoid this if they offered some popular entrées in both full and half sizes. Instead of selling 10 ounces of pasta for \$10, they could also sell a 5-ounce portion for \$5. Yet what restaurant in its right mind would want to sell less food for less money? Only the smart ones. Just as 100-calorie packs meant higher profits and new markets (sweet-tooth dieters) for the snack companies, half-size portions mean the same for restaurants.

Let's test this out in a truck stop. After all, if it can make it there, it can make it anywhere. Trail's Family Restaurant is a Minnesota truck stop on I-35 that's hard to miss because it has a ten-foot-high chainsaw-carved wooden Viking in the lobby.<sup>xivxv</sup> It does a solid business--half the customers are local townsfolk and half are truckers and travelers--but Trail's wanted to do better *and* help their truckers, travelers, and townsfolk eat better.

We started by recommending they offer half-size portions of some popular entrées. They did it, but instead of losing money, they made more. Whereas Lester and Grace would regularly visit the restaurant and split a \$10 chicken entrée because “it was big enough for two,” they now each ordered their own half-size version. For twenty years, Lester had quietly let his wife order the chicken breast. Now he could order a half-size steak, and they still had the room to order an appetizer or the \$4 salad. Trails also made more money from the people at the table next to them. These people heard about smaller portions and lower prices and figured they'd eat here rather than ordering a flavorless turkey sandwich at the sub shop.

Within three months, more people went to the restaurant, more total entrees were sold, and more people bought side salads. Each month they sold three times as many half-size meals. They also sold 435 more monthly side orders of salad than they did before.<sup>xvi</sup>

## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### Offer Half-Size Portions of the Favorites

Won't a restaurant lose money if they offer half-size portions of their most popular entrées? No. They usually make more money.<sup>xvii</sup>

1. **People buy extra things.**
2. **Two half-size portions at 50 to 70 percent of the price of a full portion is still 100 percent more than if two people went somewhere else because weren't that hungry.**
3. **Being able to eat a little less for a little less money might bring in new diners who would have stayed home.**

While offering the half-size portions was only one of a dozen restaurant makeover changes we made at Trail's Restaurant, it made a big difference. Guest counts increased, sales increased, and check averages increased.<sup>xviii</sup> Also, for the first time, they won the award for Top Sales of the Year, and they won the award for National Franchise Restaurant of the Year.

Asking our server or the manager for a half-size portion -- or to make it a permanent part of the menu -- is tough for some of us. But it becomes a lot easier for some of us if we think we're doing them a favor. It might even make them Restaurant of the Year.<sup>xix</sup>

## Smaller and Taller

**Remember the owner** of all of those Chinese buffets in chapter 1? When he tossed his 12-inch plates and bought 10-inch ones, other things got smaller, too. People took less food, they wasted less, they ate less, and it cost the restaurant less. The only thing that increased were his profits.

But what if you're not serving yourself or you don't own a buffet? Small plates work great for buffets, but they also work for restaurants with table service. Here's why. That 8-ounce strip steak looks great on the 12-inch plate most restaurants serve it on, but it looks massive on a nice-looking 10-inch plate. It looks like a bigger, better value for the money ("Jeez . . . it filled the whole plate!"). In one study with a favorite colleague of mine, Koert van Ittersum, we found that when we reduced the size of plates, people rated the food as a better value--even when there was 15 percent less food.<sup>xx</sup>



It's the same with glasses. Both their size and shape bias how much we pour and how good of a deal we think it is. When pouring out of a gallon jug, you'll pour less milk or Red Bull into a small glass than a large one, but you'd also pour less into a tall, thin glass than a short, wide one that holds the same volume. But it's not just you. The same thing happens to professional pourers--to bartenders.

One winter we visited 86 Philadelphia bartenders--from high-end Rittenhouse Square restaurant lounges with orchids in their windows to low-end West Philly dives with iron bars on their windows. We asked them to pour how much amount alcohol they would use to make a gin and tonic, a whiskey on the rocks, a rum and Coke, and a vodka tonic. It didn't matter if they had worked there for thirty minutes or thirty years, the typical bartender poured 30 percent more alcohol into short, wide 10-ounce tumblers than into 10-ounce highball glasses. When we showed these bartenders how much they over-poured, they balked, even guffawed. They're experts--they do this all the time. We asked them to pour again two minutes later. Same result.<sup>xxi</sup>

If bartenders pour 30 percent too much alcohol into short glasses, it costs the bar money--alcohol is a lot more expensive than tonic, Coke, or ice cubes. That's bad for the bar, but it's also bad for you: if you think you're getting two drinks' worth of alcohol when you're really getting closer to three, you might think again about driving.

This was important enough for us to take on the road. We contacted the big chains--like Applebee's, TGI Friday's, and Olive Garden--and let them know there was an easy way they could make more profit on each drink while also helping their diners get less buzzed. We showed them that regardless of how

super awesome their bartenders were and how much training they had, they would always pour 30 percent more alcohol into short, wide tumblers than tall, skinny highball glasses. The easiest solution: use only tall, skinny glasses for most of the drinks, unless somebody insists on a short one.

**Bartenders would always pour 30 percent more alcohol into short, wide tumblers than tall, skinny highball glasses.**

Of course, as they say in *This Is Spinal Tap*, "It's a fine line between clever and stupid."<sup>xxii</sup> Some of these chains ended up jumping overboard, apparently thinking, "If tall is better than short, then the Super-Duper Tall must be best." Visit some of these casual dining chains today and you'll find specialty drinks come in atmospherically tall glasses with ridiculously little in them--they look like two-foot long straws. Though perhaps more stupid than clever, it still works.



## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### Smaller Dishware and Taller Glasses

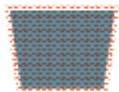
Buying all-new dishware costs a lot, but its good for both restaurants and for us. When my Lab tells restaurants that smaller plates and taller glasses save money, the restaurants that make changes do one of three things: some restaurants save money by reducing both their plate size *and* entrée size--smaller plates, smaller entrées, lower food costs. Some also cut the price of the entrée. And some keep the entrée the same size because it looked like a much better value than when on a bigger plate--“That steak totally filled the plate!”

There are also big benefits to taller glasses--even expert bartenders pour about about 30 percent less alcohol into them than into short, wide tumblers.<sup>xiii</sup> Since water, ice, and mixers are cheaper than the cheapest alcohol, restaurants make more profit, and a customer doesn't hop in the driver's seat thinking they've have two drinks when they've really had over two and a half.

*Skinny Glasses Mean Less Alcohol and Skinnier, More Sober Drinkers*

## TALLER GLASSES MEAN FEWER CALORIES... BUT THERE'S A LIMIT

THESE GLASSES ALL HOLD 12 OZ., BUT...



You'll pour 32%  
more into this  
glass ...



than this one.



You'll pour 12%  
more into this  
glass ...

than this one.

## Bread and Water

**In the history of Western Civilization**, no one has ever left a Mexican restaurant saying, “I wish I’d eaten more tortilla chips.” Nobody has ever left an Italian restaurant drooling for more bread and olive oil. Given all the times we’ve eaten out, we ought to know that it’s way too easy to carbo-load before our meal arrives. Restaurants pile the carb freebies on the table because they think it’s a low-cost way to make us happy. They sometimes even bring these items out before the menu--which is a silly thing to do because we eat up, fill up, and don’t order the high-profit appetizers and side dishes.

Sure, we could simply turn down the bread or tortilla chips, but when your friends are famished, it’s hard to be the Carbo-Enforcer. But it would be easier to say no if the server *asked* whether you wanted it. It’s easier to turn down a bread basket up front than to send it back after it arrives. Changing their bread-offering policy is a smart win-win move for restaurants--especially since they can make more money selling you other expensive items.

So a slim by design restaurant can help you avoid carbs, but it should also help you drink more water.<sup>xxiv</sup> Most of us run around slightly dehydrated, and although our bodies know something’s missing, we don’t think it’s water.<sup>xxv</sup> We confuse it for hunger and we overeat. It’s best to over-drink water during a meal even if we don’t think we need it. When we’ve recommended that drought-area California restaurants offer water, they’ve said, “But the law won’t allow us to give water unless people ask.” The solution’s easy: Ask your customers if they want it. The number who take water would double.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### BREAD BASKET CONFIDENTIAL

#### Butter or Olive Oil—Which Is the Slim-by-Design Choice?

Think olive oil is healthy? Not if you eat it all.

We slipped diners in Italian restaurants either butter or olive oil to see how much they would use on their bread. After they finished their meal, we weighed the remaining olive oil and the remaining bread. The verdict?

Olive oil users conveniently dunked each piece of their bread into 19 percent more calories of fat than those given butter. But here’s the twist—they get tired of olive oil faster than they do butter, so they end up eating fewer pieces of bread.<sup>xxvii</sup> Diners served olive oil ate 264 calories’ worth of bread, compared to 319 calories for those served butter.

If you’re going to eat one or two pieces of bread, butter’s better. If you’re going to eat until you’re stuffed, olive oil will get you to eat less bread.

But the best slim-by-design solution would be to tell the waiter to hold the bread in the first place.

But won’t people who drink more water drink less iced tea, Coke, or Avocado Margaritas? Strangely enough, they don’t – they drink what they otherwise would – plus more water. The people who wouldn’t drink anything else would have asked for water anyway – and that’s the free water from the tap.

## What You Can Do . . .

### Tell Servers, “Keep the Bread and Bring More Water”

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If the bread’s not in front of you, you probably won’t miss it, and you’ll probably enjoy your meal more. As the French say, “Hunger’s the best sauce.”

The opposite’s true with water. It’s good to have a glass of it staring at you. If you ask, it shall be yours.

## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### Calorie Counting: Start with a Few Favorites

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Too much of a hassle for your restaurant to calculate calories and update them with every new item? This could help.

First, they could calculate the calories for a just a few of the most frequently ordered items or the healthiest items. They could post these on the menu, on a table tent insert, or have laminated versions around in case someone asks. Now it’s up to us to ask. If it’s important for us to know the calories and it’s important for them to keep customers, they’ll make the change.

Second, a restaurant can do this easily because all they need is a phone. A quick call and a quick “here’s-the-basic-recipe” meeting with a dietician or nutritionist is inexpensive. A quick call to a local college with a similar student program might even be free.

## Faster Food and Happier Meals

**About twenty-five years ago**, I was at my favorite Palo Alto Burger King with a vegetarian friend who asked the cashier if they sold vegetarian burgers. The cashier replied, “Yep, we sure do.” As we talked and waited for our order, I laughed when I saw the counter worker prepare her vegetarian burger. He efficiently unwrapped a Whopper, took off the meat, threw it away, wrapped it back up, and handed it to my friend. Le Whopper sans boeuf!

Things have come a long way since then. Whether it’s Taco Bell’s cheese- and guacamole-free Fresco line or KFC’s baked chicken sandwich, some fast food items are getting healthier and still taste good. But most of us fast food lovers don’t know this, because we always tend to order the same three items over and over and over again.

For at least ten years, Burger King has allowed you to swap out your French fries for a side salad. But back then, only about one in 30 people reportedly ordered the salad.<sup>xxvii</sup> Maybe the other 29 want fries, or maybe they didn’t know they could make the swap—it’s not really advertised anywhere. The same used to be true with McDonald’s Happy Meals. Before they switched to the four-piece meal (adding apple slices and cutting the size of the French fry package), kids could get fat-free milk and apple slices instead of a Coke and fries.<sup>xxviii</sup> Unfortunately, most kids and parents didn’t know about it, so 89 percent still got fries.<sup>xxix</sup>

There are tons of healthy fast food options. The problem--which is as old as McDonald’s failed low-fat McLean burger of 1995--is that not enough people buy them. But these companies can change this by making these new healthier choices cheaper and more convenient—the two main reasons we buy fast food in the first place. Surprisingly, they don’t have to be *much* cheaper—they only need to look a tad cheaper. Americans love deals, and even a tiny deal will make some of us change direction.

### Calorie Labeling Conundrums

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Putting calories on menus will help us eat less, right? No, most studies show very confusing results.<sup>xxx</sup> If it seems so obvious, why doesn’t it work?

Calories mean different things to different people. To most people reading this book, calories mean we’ll get fat. But to somebody who’s walking into a Taco Bell with a couple bucks in his pocket, calories tell him what will fill him up, what will taste good, and what’s the best value. When the decision’s between a 400- and 800-calorie burrito, we might pick the one that keeps us thin, and *he* might pick the tasty one that fills him up for least amount of money.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Calorie labeling gives people information; you just can’t guarantee what they’ll do with it. They don’t always use it to eat less.<sup>xxxii</sup>

As one part of their company wellness program, Rich Foods, a large company in Buffalo, asked us to try to motivate the French fry-loving lunch goers in the cafeteria to either order a side salad (instead of fries) with their combo meal, or to order a chicken breast salad. To do so, we developed a Healthy Habit loyalty card. Every time a worker ordered a salad, his or her card was punched. After six punches, they got a free meal. This increased salad sales by 21 percent more than when they were instead given a 50-cent discount.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

What about all of the money the restaurant lost by giving away every sixth meal? Most people don't remember to cash in their rewards cards, and even when they did, the cafeteria was happy they were buying five meals at the cafeteria and not at the Buffalo wing joint across the street.

These deals don't have to be very big. Even a 5-cent discount can nudge a fence-sitter to order a diet soft drink instead of a regular one, or a baked chicken sandwich instead of a fried one. This works even if the restaurant doesn't cut the price but instead says that 5¢ goes to charity.

## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### Fast Food Favors

Here are just a few of the ways fast food restaurants can help you eat healthy and do themselves a favor by making you a happy repeat customer:

- 1. Make it motivating**
  - ❖ **Start a Healthy Habits loyalty card – 5 punches and the sixth healthy item is free.**
  - ❖ **Give 5 percent off the healthier combo version: Diet vs. regular, baked vs. fried.**
- 2. Make it easy**
  - ❖ **Move the high-margin healthy choices up on the menu board.**
  - ❖ **Feature these items on in-store promotions, such as table tents, tray liners, or posters.**

Give away a sixth meal? Give a 5 percent discount? On a \$5.00 meal that's a 25-cent loss. Think of it instead as a \$4.75 gain, because diners could have easily otherwise gone somewhere else. And it's a \$9.50 gain if they brought a friend.

These healthy items could also be moved to the top of the menu board, or they could be pictured on posters or highlighted on table tents—the way McDonald’s only advertises white milk in ads for Happy Meals. Just as with menus, fast food posters and menu boards can make healthy foods more visible and more exciting, with juicy descriptions, in-your-face graphics, special fonts or colors, boxed specials, corner positioning, and so on. Even the cashier can prompt a healthier choice: “Can I start you off with a salad?”

## What You Can Do . . .

### How to Change Almost Anything at Burger King (and Elsewhere)

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Burger King prides itself on letting you “have it your way”; there are 1024 different ways you can order a Whopper.<sup>xxxiv</sup> But what if you wanted them to do even more . . . like sell a low-fat hamburger, a low-calorie dessert, give a 5-cent discount if you order a diet soft drink, and put up posters inside encouraging kids to choose the apple slices and the milk?

You can mention this to the manager—he has some local flexibility in what he serves, how he prices food, and what he promotes in the store. Yet here’s a case when you get a chance to act both locally *and* globally—you can also directly email the King himself. Let him know the changes you think would be healthy, reasonable, and profitable to make. If you’re not sure what to say, you can copy parts or all of the sample letter on page 000. If all you want to do is to Xerox it, fill in your name, and sign it, that’s fine also. Have it your way.

Burger King knows you have dozens of choices where you eat, and they won’t take it lightly if they hear from you or see your #BurgerKing tweet. Nor will #McDonalds, #Taco Bell, #KFC, #Pizza Hut, or whatever fast food restaurant you and your family visit most often. Let them know how they can help you become slim by design. Following that letter on page 000 are the addresses, Twitter hashtags, and emails for many of our favorite fast food chains.

## What Would Batman Eat?

**Millions of parents take** their happy kids to fast food restaurants every day. Most of us don't even try to get our kids to order the apple slices instead of the fries or to order the white milk instead of the juice. We're there because we don't have the time, energy, or motivation to cook, and because we also don't have the time, energy, or motivation to argue with our kids--especially when we're the ones getting the fries with our Combo-meal.

My Cornell Food and Brand Lab has done about a hundred studies with little kids, and one totally "duh" finding we've made is that they can be stubbornly habitual in what they want to eat. If kids had French fries yesterday, they want them again today--it's their default and it works for them. If you ask them if they want apple slices or French fries, they'll answer before you finish your question. The secret might be in interrupting this default, so they push the reset button on the side of their brain--so they at least give apple slices a chance.

Here's an idea. Instead of asking them what they want, what if we ask them about someone they admire? If we ask them--without judgment--what a friend, teacher, Scout Leader, or their favorite superhero would choose, it might cause them to push that reset button and think again. Our code name for this study was, "What Would Batman Eat?"

That summer we were helping sponsor a 4-H summer camp for elementary school kids, and one week we decided to treat them to their choice at a local fast food restaurant--apple slices or French fries. Now, if you ask twenty five- to ten-year-olds whether they want apple slices or French fries, the score will be French fries 19, apple slices 1. But the next week we tried something different. Instead of asking what *they* wanted, we asked, "What would Batman eat, apple slices or French fries?" After they answered for Batman, we'd ask, "What do *you* want to eat, apple slices or French fries?"<sup>xxxv</sup> This time, the number of kids who ordered apple slices jumped from 1 to 9--almost half of them.

What would  
Batman eat,  
apple slices or  
French fries?





We've done this a bunch of times in a bunch of different ways, and here's what's crazy. First, it doesn't matter *who* you say: Batman, the Joker, their teacher, or their best friend. Simply having to answer for *anyone* seems to make them think twice--and often change their order. Second, it doesn't matter *what* they answer. They could precociously say that Batman or their third grade teacher would eat French fries, but they'll still order apple slices half the time.



**It doesn't matter who you say: Batman, the Joker, their teacher, or their best friend.**

The only thing that doesn't work is if you ask them too early. If you ask them even 15 minutes before they place their order, only 25 percent will still order apple slices. You can plan ahead, but don't ask until you pull into the parking lot.

Within three days of our findings, the people my Lab changed the way we feed our kids. Anytime our kids are facing an either/or decision in a restaurant--milk or soft drink, fried or baked, green beans or macaroni--we casually ask them, "What would [\_\_\_\_\_] eat?" Of course you have to change up the name, but if you ask it nonjudgmentally, it's amazing how many times they push their brain's reset button and do the right thing. And if it doesn't work this time, try using a different name next time. Now, back to the Bat Cave.

## What You Can Do . . .

### What Would Batman Eat?

No kid in their right mind would choose an apple over French fries--unless you ask. The secret is you can't ask them what *they* want to eat, you have to ask them what their favorite friend, teacher, or superhero would eat. Here are some tips our What Would Batman Eat? studies have shown work:

- ❖ **Be specific, nonjudgmental, and make it a decision between two choices:**  
"What would Batman eat—apple slices or French fries?"
- ❖ **Don't criticize their answer or editorialize. Then simply ask, "What do you want--apple slices or French fries?"**
- ❖ **Give them what they asked for and move on.**

Crazy . . . but doing this for yourself will also help you make similar choices. Before making your choice between the salad and the the cheesy bacon fries, if you ask yourself, "What would my cool friend \_\_\_\_ choose?" you'll be a lot less tempted. Thinking about what a well-liked person would do makes us less indulgently compulsive. It's somewhat in the spirit of when people wore the W.W.J.D. wristbands. When faced with a difficult decision, it was supposed to prompt them to ask themselves, "What Would Jesus Do?"

I'm pretty sure he wouldn't have ordered the Cheesy Bacon Fries.

## Transforming a Town

**What if a whole town** of restaurants agreed to become slim by design? Over the years we've advised the big casual dining chains to use smaller plates because it makes the food look bigger, and it makes people eat less and be more satisfied. We've advised these same chains and legions of bars to serve drinks in tall, skinny highball glasses instead of short, wide tumblers so that bartenders pour less and drinkers drink less. We've helped companies redesign their menus so diners purchase the most healthy and most profitable items. But we hadn't tried to transform an entire town of restaurants to help lead their diners to be slim by design. One evening in the fall of 2008, I'd have my chance.

I got a call from a soon-to-be-friend named Dan Buettner, a fellow Midwesterner my age who had written *Blue Zones*, a book on longevity. His plan was to take a small town in Minnesota called Albert Lea and make the townsfolk healthier. He wanted me to come up with an easy checklist of what they could do in their homes, and to also develop a simple plan--a restaurant pledge--that restaurants could use to help people eat better.

At that time I was completing my White House appointment as executive director of the USDA agency in charge of the Dietary Guidelines. When you're a White House or Presidential appointee, you have the gift of seeing into the future. You know the exact date and time you're going to be fired: 1:00 PM on the inauguration day of the next president. I told him I'd happily take on his challenge when I returned to Cornell, but that I'd ask restaurants to make only the changes I believed would make them more money. Otherwise the whole plan would fail; no restaurateur can be expected to push healthier choices just because he's a jolly good fellow.

The rules were as follows: the changes I suggested either had to bring in more customers or increase the check size per customer, *and* these changes had to lead diners to buy either healthier food or fewer calories. I'd already suggested most of these changes to restaurants when at the USDA, so I knew they worked.

The restaurants in Albert Lea, Minnesota, ranged from an elegant bistros to truck stops, <sup>xxxvi</sup> from fast food outlets to fish fry roadhouses. I asked these restaurants to make any three of the changes on the original pledge (see sidebar)--whichever they thought would be easiest and most profitable for them. I thought this would be easy, but small towns are small towns. Even though I grew up only 200 miles away in Iowa, they were still pretty suspicious--I was now a geeky, East Coast, Ivy-League professor, and that's just a little too weird for everyday life.



No restaurateur can be expected to push healthier choices just because he's a jolly good fellow.

## How Your Restaurant Can Help You . . .

### The Original Slim by Design Restaurant Pledge

Restaurants can increase check averages and bring in new customers by making easy changes that help diners eat healthier and become slim by design.

While there's a full 100-point Restaurant Scorecard at the end of the chapter, we often recommend that a restaurant start by checking out the idea of Slim by Design by making only the three basic changes they think would be easiest, quickest, and most profitable. These are the ten they most often choose.

- ❑ **1.** Create a menu that highlights high-margin healthy options using the tips in the Menu Makeover (page 000).
- ❑ **2.** Use serving plates that are no bigger than 9 to 10 inches in diameter.
- ❑ **3.** Offer an option of smaller portions of selected entrees (say, half the amount for 50 to 70 percent of the price).
- ❑ **4.** Develop at least two new healthy meals or side dishes.
- ❑ **5.** Offer bread or tortilla chips only if asked.
- ❑ **6.** Offer a salad/vegetable substitution option for French fries (or other starches).
- ❑ **7.** Replace short, wide bar glasses with taller, narrower glasses.
- ❑ **8.** Promote a “We’ll pack half” policy—have servers let customers know that you’ll set aside half a dish before serving
- ❑ **9.** Train the servers to mention only the healthy side dishes.
- ❑ **10.** Create a “fruit-only” dessert option, such as a bowl of berries or a melon plate, and give it a refreshing, appealing name.

Along with this Slim by Design Restaurant Scorecard, there are other certification programs that encourage restaurants to make win-win healthy changes. Some focus more on encouraging choice (like REAL--the United States Healthy Foods Council), some focus more on the food (like Blue Zones), and some are in between (Woo Food). Find out more at [SlimbyDesign.org](http://SlimbyDesign.org).

To overcome their hesitation, I visited their restaurants, helped solve their challenges, drafted up personalized plans for their restaurants, and held small nightly workshops for them. Late in the evening after one workshop, a restaurant owner asked if I had tried some of these slim by design strategies on a local joint called the Nasty Habit. I said I hadn't heard of it, and four or five of them chuckled among themselves and left.

Locals call it the Nasty Habit, but its neon sign calls it "The Nasty Habit Saloon." It's a dark bar at the dark end of a short dark street. Late one night, Dan, Nancy Graham (the editor of *AARP* magazine), and I decided to check it out for an hour (or more). A couple days later I was again talking to some of these restaurant owners.

"Been to the Nasty Habit yet?" one of them asked, as the others chuckled.

"Yeah, I was there," I said, "but I wasn't really in the spirit of doing a makeover of the place. It was late and about all I could see this massive, blinding Jägermeister sign."

"Did you have one? A Jägermeister?" he asked.

"Well, yeah, of course," I said, "It was about 11:00 and I hadn't eaten dinner, so yeah, I had a shot of Jägermeister and a bag of Fritos."

Small towns are small towns. Maybe it's my imagination, but things seemed to turn around with these restaurants owners. Picturing me eating Fritos for dinner next to a Jägermeister sign might have struck a chord.

Some of these restaurant owners might have been initial doubters, but the "pick-and-choose" approach of doing only what they thought would make them money was a juicy selling point. Again, they weren't doing it for some abstract ideal of having healthier customers; they were doing it to make money. But these restaurants stepped up to the plate--and got the credit and customers they deserved. *AARP* magazine even called it the Minnesota Miracle. But then that could have been the Jägermeister talking.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The restaurant makeover (as with the household makeovers) in Albert Lea was a community effort by community leaders to try to get everyone--from restaurants to households--to make just a couple small changes. There's good news and bad news here. The bad news is that community efforts are a top-down, and they can require mountains of money, tons of time, and lots of tedious meetings. The good news is that you don't have to wait for a community movement if you focus on your own food radius. All it takes is you.



## Is Your Favorite Restaurant Making You Fat?

**Asking a restaurant** to start with just three small changes is one way my Lab helped restaurants take baby steps to becoming more profitably Slim by Design. Over the years, our studies have discovered dozens of other changes restaurants can make to profitably help customers eat healthier. They're profitable because some changes guide people to buy the \$10 Shrimp Salad instead of the \$6 Onion Rings, others are profitable because they bring in new customers looking for a restaurant that meets their healthy eating needs, and still others are profitable because they keep their loyal customers coming in a little more frequently because they know they won't have to blow their diets the way they used to.



**If restaurant owners and managers want our business, they'll listen. If not, we can always find a new favorite.**

The 100 top changes that can help you eat healthier are each awarded one point in the Slim by Design Restaurant Scorecard. Although it's designed for restaurants to use to become healthier and more profitable, you can use it too. It helps you know which of your favorite restaurants will make you slimmer and which will make you fatter. Each of the action items--offering half-size entrée portions, having at least three healthy appetizers, offering bread only if

requested, and so on--gets a checkmark and is worth a point. The higher the score, the more your restaurant is nudging you to be slim by design rather than fat by design. But besides helping you evaluate your favorite restaurant, you can also use the scorecard to decide what changes you'd most like them to make. If an unchecked action would help you eat better, ask the manager to make a change to keep you coming back. The worst they can do is say no.

With just a few changes, restaurants can help make you healthier and themselves wealthier. Some changes cost time and money (such as buying smaller plates), but others can be done in a day. But you don't have to wait for the restaurant to change for *you* to change. Sit far away from the buffet, ask for a half-price portion or a to-go box, ask them to bring the water and hold the bread--these are mindlessly easy changes that are healthier than leaving things to fate. Think back to the diner waitress who comes to the table with a full tray of coffee and says, "Who asked for the coffee in a clean cup?" *We* can be the one who asks for our coffee in the clean cup. *We* can either wait and hope for change, or ask for it.

But the best results happen if restaurants lean in and make changes, too. Ask for the manager, and tell them what changes would make it easier for you to eat better. If you don't know what to say, you can copy one of the two letters starting on page 000 and either hand it, e-mail it, or text it to them. You could also download a letter from [SlimbyDesign.org/Restaurants](http://SlimbyDesign.org/Restaurants), change it to suit your personality, and send it.

There's no one-size-fits-all change for every restaurant owner, and it's up to them to decide what will work. Chapter 7 shows what tips and strategies you can use to start your own movement. If restaurant owners and managers want our business, they'll listen. If not, we can always find a new favorite.

## Slim by Design Restaurant Self-Assessment Scorecard

Is your favorite restaurant making you slimmer or fatter? This scorecard would tell you. The higher the score, the harder they're trying to make you slim. Anything that isn't checked is one more change they can make. Pick out something they could do to make you eat a little better and to be a happier customer. Then ask them to help. These are all proven, research-based (or at least principle-based) changes that help people eat less and help restaurants make money. We update them each year with our newest findings—check them out again next year with the newest scorecard at [SlimByDesign.org](http://SlimByDesign.org).

### Pre-Meal and Décor

- The restaurant lighting is neither too brightly or too dark
- At least some dining locations are well-lit
- The restaurant is neither too loud or too quiet
- At least some dining locations are quiet
- There are scales in the bathrooms
- Customers are seated near the windows first; dark corners last
- There are no TV sets (including in the bar)
- There no more than two TV sets (including in the bar area)
- Bread (including tortillas) is brought only upon request
- Water glasses are at each table setting (along with utensils) when diners are seated
- Water is provided to everyone, or each is asked if they want water
- Water glasses hold at least 12 ounces
- Raw vegetables or a healthy sample (amuse-bouche) are offered before dinner instead of bread

### Menu Design

- At least 3 healthy appetizers are offered
- At least 3 healthy entrées are offered
- At least 3 healthy desserts are offered
- At least 3 healthy beverages (other than water) are offered
- A non-starch vegetable or fruit is the default
- A salad is the default
- A soup option is available as a substitute
- Include a healthy side with unhealthy entrees
- Colored or bolded words are used to highlight healthy target foods
- Logos or icons are used draw attention to targeted item (but don't use "healthy" logos, which can signal bad taste scare diners away)
- There is a healthy section of the menu labeled "Light and Fresh" or a similar taste-related phrase
- Selected entrees are available in half-size portions (but labeled as trim, moderate, light, etc.)
- Appealing and evocative words are used to describe healthy items to make them sound mouthwatering
- At least five healthy items are placed in one of the four corners or special sections of the menu
- Salads are the default side dish selection for lunch (as opposed to French fries)
- The healthier items are listed first in each of the menu sections (such as appetizers, entrees, desserts, and so forth)

- Healthy, high-margin items are in bold or in colored boxes to call them out (when appropriate)
- Wait staff is instructed to recommend healthy pairings
- Appealing photos of healthy target items are highlighted on the menu or table tents (when appropriate)
- Calorie levels of selected items are on the menu or available
- A separate menu or an App with calorie listings is available

### Kids Meals

- The kids menu offers fun, healthy options (such as Broccoli Madness)
- The health items on children's menus are bright and appealing
- Coloring books or interactive placemats are related to nutrition
- Friendly cartoons promote healthy foods on the kids menus
- Fruit or vegetables are the default side item
- Non-fat or 1% milk is the default beverage
- Plates, glasses, and bowls are smaller for children than adults

### Wait staff

- Mentions at least one special of the day that is healthy
- Mentions a to-go box *before* people order
- Mentions a "we'll pack half" policy before serving
- Mentions the healthiest side items first
- Mentions healthy substitutes
- Offers desserts to go
- Mentions to-go containers for desserts
- Mentions healthy desserts first
- Knows the two or three lighter entrées that get the most compliments

### Specials and Promotions

- At least one appetizer special is healthier
- At least one entrée special is healthier
- At least one dessert special is healthier
- Display and dramatize healthy options as the first thing seen when entering and as point of purchase display, visible and accessible (for example, a salad bar by the counter, apples by the register)
- Half of the Internet coupons promote a healthier item
- Half the items promoted on the website are healthier items
- A frequent salad-buyer program is available (such as 5 punches = free salad)
- Family combos are served – kid's dish with an adult dish, or family style dishes that can be split
- Discounts or deals are available on healthy family meals
- Meal bundles or combos are available that feature healthy combinations and feature non-fried food, and veggies with an appetizer, salad, and small dessert
- The first specials mentioned are ones that offer salad as a course
- Delivery or carry-out meals contain a fruit or healthier salad option
- Meals are lower in calories than the dine-in equivalent
- A gym, fitness, or health center is co-promoted in the restaurant
- A discount on healthy meals is offered on a predetermined Sponsor night – where the restaurant donates the savings to the targeted charity or cause.

## Dinnerware

- Plates are less than 10 inches in diameter
- Plates are a darker color than white or beige
- Bowls hold 16 ounces or less
- Bar glasses are tall and narrow
- Wineglasses are narrower at the bottom than the top
- Glasses hold 16-oz or less
- Plates have a wide colored rim

## Portion-size, Preparation, and Substitution Options

- A double portion of vegetables is available for a side dish substitution
- The entrée special is available in a half-size portion
- At least three entrées are available in half-size portions
- The dessert special is also available in a half-size portion
- At least three desserts are available in half-size portions
- Vegetable portions are 20 percent larger than in the past
- The relative size of vegetables on the plate has increased and the other relative size of the starch has decreased
- There is the option of having your food cooked with a low fat spray (like PAM)
- You have the option of requesting the type of cooking material you would like used (e.g. cooking pasta with water instead of oil)
- There is the option of having either lightly or regularly seasoned versions
- Dressings and sauces can be requested on the side (when appropriate)
- Extra vegetables can be substituted for the starch
- Soup can be substituted for the starch
- Salad can be substituted for the starch
- Fruit or a fruit salad is available instead of traditional desserts
- Sugar-free syrup is available
- Sugar-free jellies are available

## Bar

- Default glasses are tall and narrow rather than short, wide tumblers
- Wine glasses are narrower at the bottom than at the top
- Patrons are asked if they would like a glass of water
- Wine flights are available
- Diet tonic water is available
- Non-alcoholic beer is available
- There is a wine special
- Bar snacks are provided only when requested
- Bar snacks are healthier, such as nuts rather than chips and Chex mix

## Scoring Brackets:

70-100 – Slim by Design Restaurant - Gold

50-69 – Slim by Design Restaurant - Silver

30-49 – Slim by Design Restaurant - Bronze



## Chapter 3 -- Endnotes

## (For the Back of the Book)

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- <sup>i</sup> Our recent survey of wait staff showed they believed only about 18% of their diners asked for to go bags. But it's getting easier to ask if they want one. Some nicer restaurants will even give you a coat check-style tag you use to you pick up the to-go box at the end of the meal. That way you don't have an untidy plastic bag of food waiting by your elbow while you finish your coffee.
- <sup>ii</sup> This is detailed Daniel Kahneman (2011), *Thinking: Slow and Fast*, Knopf Books: New York, and also in Dan Ariely's (2009) "Predictably Irrational" Harper Perennial: New York.
- <sup>iii</sup> For wine lovers, this is a funny study in chapter 1 of *Mindless Eating*. This was done in our original research restaurant, which was the Spice Box in Urbana, Illinois, Brian Wansink, Collin R. Payne, and Jill North (2007), "Fine as North Dakota Wine: Sensory Expectations and the Intake of Companion Foods," *Physiology and Behavior*, 90:5 (April), 712-16.
- <sup>iv</sup> Still a working paper: Racheal Behar and Brian Wansink "Would you Take Leftovers? A Test of the Endowment Effect in Restaurants," Cornell Food and Brand Lab Working Paper Series 2013:13-14.
- <sup>v</sup> One example of this is when wine is heavily promoted at such meals: Brian Wansink, Glenn Cordua, Ed Blair, Collin Payne, and Stephanie Geiger (2006), "Wine Promotions in Restaurants: Do Beverage Sales Contribute or Cannibalize?" *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly*, 47:4 (November) 327-36.
- <sup>vi</sup> A number of managers have told me that after accounting for food costs and labor, there's less profit in a lot of the low-cost, unhealthy items as there is in a lot of the healthier appetizers, sides, and entrées.
- <sup>vii</sup> It's like the parents who say their child eats only macaroni and cheese because they long ago gave up trying to offer the kid anything else.
- <sup>viii</sup> Of course, if a restaurant sells only chicken wings and onion rings, these same insights can be used to encourage people to overeat. Fortunately, most restaurants would rather make twice as much on a healthy food than make half as much selling anything else.
- <sup>ix</sup> Cool implications for both fast food restaurants as well as for us . . . find the darkest quietest corner to eat! Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum (2012), "Fast Food Restaurant Lighting and Music Can Reduce Calorie Intake and Increase Satisfaction," *Psychological Reports*, 111:1, 228-232. This study is catchy but has so many limitations, it's crazy. We don't know if it was the music or the lighting or whatever that made the biggest difference. The point is that something big happens when you make these changes.
- <sup>x</sup> These results inadvertently leaked to restaurant and hospitality industry magazines long before the study was actually published. I was surprised to be giving a talk at a culinary institute in Florence in summer 2003 and see it on a reading list. The official version is Brian Wansink, Koert van Ittersum, and James E. Painter, "How Descriptive Food Names Bias Sensory Perceptions in Restaurants," *Food Quality and Preference* (2004), 16:5, 393-400.
- <sup>xi</sup> There's juicy detail about this study in *Mindless Eating* (Chapter 6. The Name Game), but here's the complete article: focuses on how menu names influence sales and repeat dining intentions. See Brian Wansink, James M. Painter, and Koert van Ittersum, "Descriptive Menu Labels' Effect on Sales," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly* (December 2001), 42:6, 68-72.
- <sup>xii</sup> Brian Wansink, James M. Painter, and Koert van Ittersum, (2001) "Descriptive Menu Labels' Effect on Sales," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly*, 42:6 (December), 68-72.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Brian Wansink and Lizzy Pope (2013), "How Many Calories Is Crispy? An Analysis of Menu Names and Calorie Levels," working paper.
- <sup>xiv</sup> I did this at a truck stop when adopting my original Restaurant Pledge so it could be borrowed by the *Blue Zones* project. Find more about half-plate profitability in the article Brian Wansink (2012), "Package Size, Portion Size, Serving Size . . . Market Size: The Unconventional Case for Half-Size Servings," *Marketing Science*, 31:1, 54-57.
- <sup>xv</sup> Here's why half-size portions work. Although the average monthly unit sales of the large-size portions dropped 297 meals per month or 40.9 percent ( $p < .001$ ), the average sales of half-size portions went from zero to 949 units per month. Furthermore, the purchase of selected side orders of salad increased 116.5 percent, from 374 units/month to 811 ( $p < .001$ ). This resulted in an average estimated sales increase \$3474. After subtracting the decrease in full-size meals and adding the new sales from half-size meals and the new sales from side orders, the increase in side orders and the new sales from half-size meals, the net increase in sales was an estimated \$6974.
- <sup>xvi</sup> More about half-plate profitability can be found here: Brian Wansink (2012), "Package Size, Portion Size, Serving Size . . . Market Size: The Unconventional Case for Half-Size Servings," *Marketing Science*, 31:1, 54-57.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Again, see Brian Wansink (2012), "Package Size, Portion Size, Serving Size . . . Market Size: The Unconventional Case for Half-Size Servings," *Marketing Science*, 31:1, 54-57.

- <sup>xviii</sup> From Matt VanVoltenberg, Trail’s Family Restaurant Manager: “Guest counts have increased since we modified our menu based on Brian Wansink’s suggestions to strategically place half-size portions by their full-size option and to purposefully list side choices with the healthiest options first. In addition, sales are up and guess check averages are on the rise.” From the Restaurant Pledge and Starter Kit from Healthyways|Blue Zones.
- <sup>xix</sup> Follow-up interviews with diners at a similar location indicated that when full-size portions for \$10 were offered in a half-size portion for \$7, some couples that would have otherwise split a full-size portion now opted for two \$7 half-size portions. Other diners reasoned that by spending a bit less on the entrée, they felt more inclined to buy another item they might not have otherwise purchased.
- <sup>xx</sup> This is truly a win-win tactic for most restaurants. Others – especially the super high-end ones want to use a large plate as more of a canvas. The other 98% of all restaurants just need a smaller plate: Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum (2014), “Portion Size Me: Plate Size Can Decrease Serving Size, Intake, and Food Waste,” Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, forthcoming.
- <sup>xxi</sup> It’s not just bartenders pouring alcohol, it’s us pouring milk, and our kids pouring juice. Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum (2003), “Bottoms Up! The Influence of Elongation and Pouring on Consumption Volume,” Journal of Consumer Research, 30:3 (December), 455-463.
- <sup>xxii</sup> This punchy difference between clever and stupid is courtesy of Nigel Tufkin, from the ingenious rockumentary spoof, *This Is Spinal Tap*. It bears repeating because the world is full of people who love to take things to the extreme. This was a witty warning.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> It’s amazing on how powerful this is. Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum (2005), “Shape of Glass and Amount of Alcohol Poured: Comparative Study of Effect of Practice and Concentration,” *BMJ – British Medical Journal*, 331:7531 (December 24) 1512-1514.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Only 40 percent of the people drink water in restaurants, so in California the water conservation policy is to not put it on the table unless someone asks.
- <sup>xxv</sup> It was once thought that if you drank a lot of water before a meal, it would fill you up and you’d take in fewer calories. In general, that doesn’t seem to hold, and the loss is less than believed. Our work with water and the National Mindless Eating Challenge showed that people who were given water-drinking tips and asked to track their weight lost only 1.2 pounds over the course of 3 months in the study. Kaipainen, Kirsikka, Collin R. Payne, and Brian Wansink (2012), “The Mindless Eating Challenge: Retention, Weight Outcomes, and Barriers for Changes in a Public Web-based Healthy Eating and Weight Loss Program,” Journal of Medical Internet Research, 14:6, 100-113.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> In our experience this goes from about 25% requesting it to about 50% accepting it. More in Brian Wansink and Katie Love (2014) “Slim by Design: Menu Strategies for Promoting High-Margin, Healthy Foods,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, forthcoming
- <sup>xxvii</sup> From *Mindless Eating*, chapter 9.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Happy Meals offer a lot of options. There’s usually a choice of the main food – Chicken McNuggets, a hamburger, or a cheeseburger (about 70 percent get McNuggets). There’s a choice of a side of French fries or apple slices (about 85 percent get French fries). There’s a choice of a drink – soft drink, chocolate milk, or low-fat white milk (about 80 percent get a soft drink).
- <sup>xxix</sup> McDonald’s change in their Happy Meal – adding apple slices, cutting French frie from 240 to 100 calories, and promoting milk – ended up cutting 104 calories out of what kids ordered – an 18 percent. What’s also cool is it even influence what their Mom or Dad ordered – dessert sales dropped from 10.1 percent to 7.9 percent. See Brian Wansink and Andrew S. Hanks (2013), “Happier Meals: How Changes in McDonald’s Happy Meals Altered Food Choices,” Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 45:4 (July-August), 45:4S, 39-40 and the full paper: Brian Wansink and Andrew S. Hanks (2013) Do Calorie Reductions in Children’s Meal Combos Lead to Within-meal Calorie Compensation,” under review.
- <sup>xxx</sup> This is tortured area of research. One of the more recent studies on this is certainly not perfect, but I’d rather poke at our own flaws than at somebody else’s: Jessica Wisdom, George Loewenstein, Brian Wansink, and Julie S. Downs (2013), “Calorie Recommendations Fail to Enhance the Impact of Menu Labeling,” American Journal of Public Health, 103:9:1604-1609.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Calorie labeling works a little (like at a Starbucks) for people who are already weight conscious and don’t need a whole lot more prompting. See Brian Wansink and Aner Tal (2014) “Does Calorie Labeling Make Heavy People Heavier?” forthcoming.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> There are a ton of reasons that other restaurants aren’t crazy about calorie labeling: menus vary, ingredients and cooks vary, accurate calculations cost money, plus they might scare customers off or lead them to enjoy their experience less. Yet there are some easy ways that both we and our favorite restaurants can get what we want. We want to eat less calories, and they want to make more money. What we can encourage them to do is to only make the changes that they think will make them more popular and more profitable. For instance, they could start with a few favorites and present them on a table tent, insert, or special section, or simply supply it when asked. It’s as simple as a phone call to a local dietician.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> This was conducted up at Rich Foods – a frozen food company in Buffalo. Elisa Chan, Brian Wansink, and Robert Kwortnik (2014) “McHealthy: Habit Changing Interventions that Improve Healthy Food Choices,” under review.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> I only know this because I was eating breakfast at a Burger King in Taipei, Taiwan, while writing this sidebar and the entrance featured a floor-to-ceiling wall decal stating this and showing the 80 most popular versions.

<sup>xxxv</sup> This is an incredibly easy technique. The article's short, but about 95% of what you need to know to use it you've already read: Brian Wansink, Mitsuru Shimizu, and Guido Camps (2012), "What Would Batman Eat? Priming Children to Make Healthier Fast Food Choices," *Pediatric Obesity*, 7:2, 121-123.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Most of these changes we had made earlier in the Trail's Family Restaurant. We had made a number of suggestions--offering half-size portions, offering healthy side dishes, and reengineering their menu to help people order healthier. Guest counts increased, sales increased, and check averages were on the rise<sup>xxxvi</sup> Also, for the first time ever, they were awarded the top National Franchise Restaurant of the Year and the National Franchise Top Sales of the Year.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> From the article in *AARP Magazine* "The Minnesota Miracle: The extraordinary story of how folks in this small town got motivated, got moving, made new friends, and added years to their lives. January/February 2010 Dan Buettner [http://www.aarp.org/health/longevity/info-01-2010/minnesota\\_miracle.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/longevity/info-01-2010/minnesota_miracle.html)