

St. Petersburg Times April 2005

Start your engine

The breakfast sandwich has never been about healthy eating; it's about filling the tank. Still, homemade creations beat drive-through menus by a mile.

By JANET K. KEELER, Times Staff Writer
Published April 6, 2005

Burger King's new Enormous Omelet Sandwich "is for landscape workers, road crews, guys putting in a hard day's work who need a hearty, satisfying breakfast to get them through the day," a company spokesman told the New York Daily News.

Michael Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest replied that landscape workers and road crews die of heart attacks like anybody else.

I say there are better ways to blow 730 calories.

To be fair, the breakfast sandwich has never been about healthy eating. The breakfast sandwich is about convenience.

Slap morning meal fixings - eggs, cheese, sausage or bacon (maybe both) - into bagel, biscuit or baguette, and you have dashboard dining's perfect food. Breakfast sandwiches are easily made at home, though more likely they are fixed by folks wearing uniforms and then purchased at drive-throughs on the way to work or school.

Even when prepared at home, breakfast sandwiches can still spin the calorie counter. Turkey bacon and low-fat ingredients have calories, too.

Burger King's whopper of an eye opener, the Enormous Omelet Sandwich (\$2.99), is a two-egg omelet, two slices of American cheese, three strips of bacon and a sausage patty on a seeded hoagie roll. The Enormous weighs in at 730 calories and 47 grams of fat. (According to the Food and Drug Administration, a person on a 2,000 calorie daily diet should eat no more than 65 grams of fat.)

"It's a parody of food," Jacobson told the Daily News last week.

The pioneering Egg McMuffin seems like health food at a mere 290 calories and 11 fat grams.

"How you start your day says a lot," says *Lisa Young*, an adjunct professor in New York University's department of nutrition and food studies. "You blow it with 730 calories and then tell yourself you won't eat until dinner, but that doesn't happen."

After eating a high-calorie meal, people tend to feel sluggish, Young says. Not exactly the best way to meet the day, she adds.

Young, whose book *The Portion Teller* will be published in May by Random House, says Burger King was probably spurred on by the widespread publicity and success of Hardee's double-patty, four-bacon-strip Monster Thickburger (1,420 calories and 107 grams of fat).

Burger King is counting on "Whopper Heads," which advertisers describe as young men from 16 to 24, to gobble up the new offering. Research shows that young men eat at fast-food restaurants about 20 times a month.

"They are marketing this to teenage boys as sort of a macho, let's-be-big thing," Young says.

That may be a contributing factor in a study released last week by the Foundation for Child Development that says American children are doing better than their parents did in nearly every aspect of life, except they are fatter and more of them live in poverty. The obesity rate among children ages 6 to 17 has tripled since 1975, from about 5 percent to nearly 16 percent.

An Enormous undertaking

To eat an Enormous Omelet Sandwich, you must first order it, which will disconcert anyone who knows anything about nutrition, or has any sense at all.

"I'll have the new Enormous thing," I whispered to the box that speaks. I expected to be admonished, especially when I also asked for the new Western Omelet Croissan'wich (320 calories and 17 grams of fat), plus a Diet Coke to wash it down.

The window guy didn't even look at me funny when he handed over the food, though it was clear that fruit would have been a better choice for me.

I divided the omelet sandwich five ways and gave samples, 146 calories and 9.4 grams of fat each, to co-workers. We hacked at the Croissan'wich, tossing about a quarter of it into the trash.

Some thought the Western was okay, some didn't. The onions tasted fake to me. We agreed, though, that the Enormous was appealing in that comforting, salty-greasy way that fast food is.

Still, none of us expected to ever have another, but we are not in the "Whopper Head" target audience either.

I had a stomachache within 30 minutes. I can't imagine eating the whole thing.

Not surprisingly, the Enormous I bought didn't look much like the glamor shot released by Burger King or the one being shown on the ubiquitous TV commercials. The roll was smooshed and seemed steamed, the way bread gets in the microwave. The omelet looked more like a sponge, with no evidence that it ever met a skillet.

When it comes to fast food, it's best not to get picky. It is cheap food fast, not haute cuisine.

A better mousetrap

If I'm going to consume 730 calories at breakfast, I'd rather eat something memorable and delicious. And that means I'll have to make it at home.

Ingredients I would consider:

Bread. Bagels, English muffins, baguettes, biscuits, croissants, pitas and tortillas are all sturdy enough to hold a multitude of fillings. You can find them whole wheat or flavored, but watch sizes. Big bagels, such as those from Einstein or Panera, are close to 400 calories, but smaller varieties, such as Lender's, are about 100 less.

How about scrambled eggs, small diced potatoes and green pepper, and sharp Cheddar cheese in a pita?

Cheese. I'd go for cheese with more cache than American singles, which aren't really cheese but rather processed food with cheese flavoring. Consider Swiss, cream cheese, goat, peppery Jack, Gouda, provolone, sharp Cheddar, blue or Brie. Some melt well, others don't.

Nothing beats the continental flair of fresh mozzarella, tomato, basil and olive oil on a baguette, which lasts for quite a while at room temperature. Tomato and basil have few calories, and fresh mozzarella is about 87 calories per ounce. Olive oil has 14 fat grams per tablespoon.

Eggs. Scrambled, poached, fried or even in a frittata, eggs are the cornerstone of the breakfast sandwich. If poached or fried, make sure the yolk is cooked through or risk a mess. Add herbs or diced veggies to scrambled eggs for interest.

I'll have a scrambled egg with chives and melted Jarlsburg Swiss on a toasted English muffin, please. One egg is about 80 calories.

Meat. Bacon and sausage are tasty, plus they come in lower-fat versions. Remember all those other salty meats, though, including ham, Canadian bacon, prosciutto, pancetta, salami and a host of German wursts. For breakfast? Heck, yes. They eat them in Munich.

The croissant is a natural foil for thin slices of Black Forest ham, Havarti and a poached egg. A dab of spicy mustard wouldn't hurt.

Incidentals. Though you have to consider portability and don't want a sandwich that's too drippy, vegetables and sauces are still possibilities. Not everyone is eating in their cars, one hand on the wheel. Sliced tomatoes, baby spinach, onions, peppers, refried beans, flavored mayonnaises, olive oil, smoked salmon, plus apples, figs or pears, pack flavor and, in some cases, nutrition.

Bacon, thin apple slices and a bit of maple syrup on big, fluffy biscuits is a winning combination.

Surely a burly landscaper or construction worker could make it until lunch on two of those.

Information from Times wires was used in this report. Janet K. Keeler can be reached at 727 893-8586 or krieta@sptimes.com

Breakfast sandwich breakdown

Burger King

Enormous Omelet Sandwich - 730 calories, 47g fat, 43g carbohydrates, 1,860mg sodium

Sausage, Egg and Cheese Crossan'wich - 520 calories, 39g fat, 24g carbohydrates, 1,090mg sodium

McDonald's

Egg McMuffin - 290 calories, 11g fat, 30g carbohydrates, 850mg sodium

Sausage Biscuit - 410 calories, 26g fat, 34g carbohydrates, 990mg sodium

Atlanta Bread Company

Bacon, Egg and Provolone Cheese on Croissant - 550 calories, 37g fat, 39g carbohydrates, 760mg sodium

Einstein Bros. Bagels

New York Lox and Bagel - 660 calories, 27g fat, 79g carbohydrates, 1,150mg sodium.

Hardee's

Loaded Breakfast Burrito - 781 calories, 51g fat, 38g carbohydrates, 1,614 mg sodium

Your House

Homemade Trail Mix Wrap - 675 calories, 17g fat, 115g carbohydrates, 428mg sodium

Sources: www.bk.com www.mcdonalds.com www.dietfacts.com www.chowbaby.com Esha Food Processor