

It's Your Choice: Twin Cities' Best Lunches

Dietitian-approved splurges and diet-friendly meals in your part of town

By Sheila Mulrooney Eldred

At midday, do you crave a comfort meal packed with flavor and nutrition? Or is tasty but calorically virtuous fare what you seek? Either way, you'll find it in these five best-bet spots for lunch. You won't need a menu: Choose from these dishes that let you splurge or put the brakes on your daily calories. Either way, we know you'll walk away satisfied. Sue Moores, RD, of St. Paul offers her perspective on nutritional highlights.

Lucia's To Go

1432 W. 31st St., Uptown Minneapolis
www.lucias.com, 612-825-9800

Lucia's Uptown hits the trifecta as a terrific bakery/neighborhood café/takeout joint. If you're waist watching, avert your eyes as you pass the scrumptious-looking pastries and baked goods. Snag a table quickly or order to go and hit the beach at nearby Lake Calhoun.

Splurge Choose the pizza of the day sprinkled with in-season toppings and opt for a chocolate sea salt cookie—you'll get all the antioxidant benefits of good dark chocolate.

Be good Load up on antioxidant carotene—and get the most flavor for your buck—with a yummy greens-and-cheese-stuffed crêpe and a local microgreen salad. Then perhaps allow yourself a mini-splurge with a mini-cupcake.

Edina Grill

5028 France Ave. S., Edina
www.edinagrill.com, 952-927-7933

This homey place is considered one of the TC's four "urban diners," along with the Groveland Tap and the Highland Grill in St. Paul and the Longfellow Grill in Minneapolis.

Splurge Opt for the sweet-potato fries, packed with vitamin A and fiber, for an alternative to regular fries with your Parmesan-crust griddled cheese sandwich.

Be good The pear salad, a sweet mix of balsamic vinegar-poached pear, roasted apple, greens, and omega-3-rich walnuts, is a delicious way to add to your daily fruit and veggie intake.

Birchwood Cafe

3311 E. 25th St., Seward, Minneapolis
www.birchwoodcafe.com, 612-722-4325

This favorite neighborhood eatery serves delectable vegan and vegetarian fare, and meat eaters won't be disappointed, either.

Splurge The summertime turkey burger, topped with heirloom



When dining at the Birchwood Cafe, order the turkey burger.

tomatoes, basil aioli, Bibb lettuce, and avocado, is served on a house-baked buttermilk bun. Add decadent applewood-smoked Fischer Farms bacon, made from local Berkshire pork.

Be good Boost omega-3s with the flavorful smoked trout plate, which includes a microgreen salad with kumquats, pistachios, and an orange-beet puree.

Shish Mediterranean Grill & Cafe

1668 Grand Ave., St. Paul, 651-690-2212

Go easy on your wallet and enjoy exotic, flavorful fare served all day.

Splurge If you're craving a burger, you'll get a good dose of zinc, iron, and B vitamins with the juicy, nicely spiced lamb burger.

Be good You won't feel like you're exerting any restraint when you see the platter of hummus, tabbouleh, baba ghanoush, falafel, feta cheese, and olives, but it's a nutritional blast of fiber, healthy fats, iron, and folate.

Cecil's

651 S. Cleveland, Highland Park, St. Paul, 651-698-6276

Here's a secret: Hit this Jewish deli on a Tuesday and order the amazing split-pea soup. If you're splurging, add a slice of one of the best chocolate cakes in the Twin Cities—to go.

Splurge Choose the Reuben for the Chicago corned beef and authentic sauce; you can feel good knowing that the hot sauerkraut contains probiotic bacteria to promote healthy digestion.

Be good The just-like-grandma's, thick split-pea soup offers iron, vitamin K, vitamin C, fiber, and vitamin A. **BHL**

Sheila Mulrooney Eldred loves any assignment that allows her to investigate the best places to eat.