Care for an entrée with your entrée? BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN ELA LOGO ELA

ichelle Obama may be planting berries and spinach on the South Lawn of the White House, but America's restaurants seem to be in a race to wow— or perhaps stun—their patrons with bigger and badder appetizers, entrées, desserts, you name it.

Forget the arms race. It's a waist race.

Yes, the economy has taken a hit, so fewer diners are eating out. Maybe restaurants are selling oversized, over-the-top platters to give customers their money's worth. Their motto: Go for the jugular (or any other major blood vessel that's available).

So here, with much further ado, are our 2009 Xtreme Eating Awards.

Information compiled by Amy Johnson.



Don't Bite

At Applebee's, The Cheesecake
Factory, T.G.I. Friday's, and Uno
Chicago Grill they're called
Sliders. At Ruby Tuesday they're
Minis. And at Chili's they're
Bites. Depending on the chain,
you can order them as an appetizer
or an entrée.

Chili's Big Mouth Bites

At Chili's, for example, you can split an appetizer of four mini-bacon-cheeseburger

Big Mouth Bites with your dining companions or wolf them down yourself. Eat just one Bite and it's like starting your meal with a Quarter Pounder. What a perfect prelude to, say, a bigger burger for your main course.

Remember when appetizers were mostly light soups or salads? Now restaurants just re-package their entrées (like meat or chicken) or side dishes (like fries with cheese) and call them appetizers.

Order Chili's four mini Big Mouth Bites as an entrée and you end up with a maxi: 1,580 calories and 28 grams of saturated fat (1½ days' worth), plus 2,930 milligrams of sodium (a two-day supply).

And that's for just the burgers. The fries, fried onion strings, and jalapeño ranch dipping sauce bring your total to 2,350 calories (there goes your quota for the day!) plus 38 grams of sat fat and 3,940 mg of sodium.

It's the ideal meal if you've got a big mouth...and want belly, bottom, hips, and clogged arteries to match.

Triple Bypass



Olive Garden Tour of Italy

You know how sometimes you just can't decide what to pick from a menu? No worries. Now you can order not just one entrée, but two...or three...at once.

Romano's Macaroni Grill calls it Mama's Trio (Primo Chicken Parmesan, Layers of Lasagna, and Chicken Cannelloni). Olive Garden takes diners on a Tour of Italy (Homemade Lasagna, Lightly Breaded Chicken Parmigiana, and Creamy Fettuccine Alfredo).

Your Olive Garden trifecta comes with 1,450 calories and 33 grams of saturated fat (thanks to the beef, Italian sausage, cheese, cream, and breading) that's swimming in 3,830 milligrams of sodium.

That's without even a single allyou-can-eat breadstick (150 calories a pop) or Garden-Fresh Salad with dressing (350 calories for each plate).

Add one of each and you've got 2,000 calories that need a new home. And *you're* the storage bin.

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Small Fry



The Cheesecake Factory

Fried Macaroni and Cheese

Some genius was using his noggin when he came up with the idea of deep-frying macaroni and cheese.

It's cheap (for The Cheesecake Factory, that is...customers pay \$8.95), and

it probably takes care of any unsold mac

& cheese side dishes back in the kitchen.

The entire platter of four coated cheese-and-whiteflour balls over creamy marinara sauce supplies 1,570 calories and 1,860 milligrams of sodium. But that's ho-hum for appetizers these days. It's the 69 grams of saturated fat—31/2 days' worth—that sets this dish apart. You'd be better off eating an entire stick of butter (57 grams of sat fat and a mere 800 calories).

Even if each person gets only one ball, there's plenty of padding for everyone's arteries and fat depots. Isn't that what sharing is all about?

FonDon't

Fondue is making a comeback. You can get it at The Melting Pot, a chain that sells nothing but. And you can order it as an appetizer at Olive Garden (Smoked Moz-

Red Lobster **Ultimate Fondue**

zarella Fonduta), Uno Chicago Grill (Shrimp & Crab Fondue), and Red Lobster (Ultimate Fondue).

Red Lobster starts off your meal with "shrimp and crabmeat in a creamy lobster cheese sauce served in a warm, crispy sourdough bowl." It's like eating 10 oz. of Velveeta with 58 Nabisco Premium Saltines.

The Ultimate Fondue runs 1,490 calories, 40 grams of sat fat, and 3,580 mg of sodium. (Add 150 calories for each of the free Cheddar Bay Biscuits on your table.)

Eating just half? That's 750 calories and a full day's worth of saturated fat and sodium before, say, your 1,090-calorie Classic Fried Seafood Platter arrives.

Add-Ons Where?



Chili's Half Rack of **Baby Back Ribs**

of ribs to any entrée...\$6.99," says Chili's menu. (Prices vary from city to city.) At Long-Horn Steakhouse, a

half-rack of ribs is one of several Great Steak Addi-

tions (like Shrimp Scampi and Lobster Tail) that you can get with your steak.

Since when did people start adding an entrée to their entrée? Adding a salad or vegetable, okay. But another main dish?

Chili's Original Half Rack of Baby Back Ribs adds 490 calories and 12 grams of saturated fat plus 2,050 mg of sodium to your meal. It's like ordering a Quarter Pounder with Cheese on the side. Or you can go with the Honey-Chipotle Half Rack to add 730 calories. That's like an extra Quarter Pounder with Cheese plus a 21 oz. (medium) Coke.

Talk about add-ons! Guess where those extra calories are headed.

Big Rear-Endings

"Hot cookie, sweet fun. Mega-sized deep dish haiku. You are kidding, right?" That's Uno Chicago Grill's clever description

Uno Mega-Sized Deep Dish Sundae

of its Mega-Sized Deep Dish Sundae. The sundae is clever, too. It starts with

a monster chocolate chip cookie that's baked in the same pan as Uno's regular deep-dish pizzas. (So efficient!) On top of the pizza-crust-size cookie comes a generous portion of ice cream covered with whipped cream and chocolate sauce drizzle.

All told, the dessert delivers 2,800 calories and 72 grams of saturated fat to your table. That's as much sat fat as you'd get in an entire regular-size Uno Prima Pepperoni Deep Dish Pizza, and the pizza isn't much higher in calories (3,660). Of course, you could shrink those numbers by sharing. Surely, the four folks at your table have room for an extra 700 calories each.

Other out-of-control desserts: LongHorn Steakhouse's Chocolate Stampede (2,180 calories and 73 grams of sat fat) and Applebee's Chocolate Chip Cookie Sundae (1,780 calories and 48 grams of sat fat).

"Life is short. Have dessert first," says Uno's menu. Good advice...if you're trying to make it even shorter.

Discomfort Food

The Cheesecake Factory Chicken and Biscuits

In this economy,
we all need
some
comfort.
So restaurants are
introducing
familiar, uncomplicated dishes that
bring back child-

hood memories. Bonus: the ingredients tend to be cheap, which boosts the restaurant's bottom line... and your waistline.

Case in point: The Cheesecake Factory's Chicken and Biscuits. For \$14.95, you get "Breast of Chicken Served over Mashed Potatoes with Shortcake Biscuits, Mushrooms, Peas and Carrots. Covered with Country Gravy." How bad could chicken breasts be?

Try roughly 2,500 calories. (That's according to The Cheesecake Factory outlets around Seattle, where a local law requires large chain restaurants to disclose numbers on their menus.)

It's not easy to find an entrée that's essentially an entire KFC 8-piece Original Recipe bucket (four drumsticks and four thighs) plus five Home-Style Biscuits (2,380 calories and 56 grams of sat fat).

Still feeling that comfort?

Meat Stroke

What's the easiest way to create a brand new dish with whatever's on hand in the kitchen? Blend two popular dishes into one. Take Applebee's Quesadilla Burger.

Applebee's Quesadilla Burger

Heaven knows, it's tough to put a new spin on burgers. And quesadillas—two large tortillas stuffed with cheese—have made it big on appetizer menus.

Mix them together and you've got the Quesadilla Burger—a beef patty plus cheddar cheese, pepper-Jack cheese, bacon, Mexi-ranch sauce, pico de gallo, and shredded lettuce tucked into two white-flour tortillas.

With fries (440 calories), your platter comes to 1,820 calories and 46 grams of saturated fat. ("Add chili & cheese to your fries for \$1.49," says the menu. Let's not even go there.)

Ordering a Quesadilla Burger with fries is like plowing through two Steak Burritos (jumbo flour tortillas stuffed with rice, black beans, steak, salsa, cheese, and sour cream) at Chipotle Mexican Grill.

And the 4,410 milligrams of sodium? They make the Quesadilla Burger a prime candidate for Applebee's Don't-Have-a-Stroke (on our property) Special.

Cheese-It

Cheeseburgers and ham-and-cheese sandwiches have been around forever. But in recent years, restaurants have started adding cheese to everything they can. Most sandwiches, salads, and soups now come with cheese. Even steaks are getting cheesed.

At Applebee's, you can coat your steak with Shrimp 'N Parmesan sauce for \$1.99. One of LongHorn Steakhouse's filets comes stuffed with fontina cheese and is served over cream sauce. At Ruby Tuesday, you can get your sirloin topped with sautéed portobello mushrooms and Parmesan cream sauce. And Outback, LongHorn, and Ruby Tuesday feature a steak with a bleu

cheese crust. (At Tony Roma's that's an option for *any* steak.)

Just what you need! An extra layer of saturated dairy fat to go with your saturated meat fat.

At The Cheesecake Factory, the Charbroiled Flat Iron Steak with fries delivers 1,760 calories, 30 grams of saturated

fat, and 3,840 milligrams of sodium. (They call *that* a meal?) Get it Philly Style and the

cheese sauce brings the damage to

2½ days' worth of sat fat (47 grams), a day's calories (2,320), and more than a 3-day supply of sodium (5,340 mg).



The Cheesecake Factory Philly Style Flat Iron Steak