

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

IS DINING OUT WORTH THE PRICE?

A shock wave of minor proportions radiated from the San Francisco Bay area recently when it was disclosed that some of the finest, most-famous restaurants there are serving pre-prepared, frozen entrees.

"People would be quite startled if they knew they were getting all dressed up, paying the baby-sitter, transportation, parking and very high costs of dining out for the same main courses that they buy in supermarkets," said Jack Sheiton, a local restaurant critic.

The truth about restaurant food caused quite a stir in a

city that prides itself on gastronomic excellence. As a consequence, people all over the country are starting to have second thoughts about the quality of the food they are eating when dining out.

"There are many restaurants using frozen food, but no one is going to admit it," observes an official of one national restaurant chain.

The furor over frozen food is just one example of the ways people concerned about food quality and nutrition often pay more but get less when dining out. Here are some of the factors you should weigh in deciding whether or not a particular restaurant meets your expectations:

How is the food cooked? Many restaurants and almost all fast-food franchises rely on deep-fat frying to prepare entrees. That results in plenty of added calories because the food absorbs some of the cooking oil.

There is also evidence that cancer-causing substances are formed when the hydrogenated oils used in deep-fat frying are heated again and again.

Is the food nutritious? "The empty calorie is as much of a public enemy in the restaurant as it is in the home," warns Virginia H. Knauer, White House Consumer Affairs expert. She says restaurants should serve more vegetables, fruits and other vitamin-and mineral-rich foods.

Are the ingredients of high quality? There is no law requiring restaurant menus to list chemical additives, artificial colorings and other questionable ingredients that may occur in certain dishes.

Chinese restaurants, for example, are notorious for their heavy use of the flavor enhancer, monosodium weakness that occur in susceptible individuals has been tagged "Chinese restaurant syndrome."

Is the food worth the price? Through mass-produced, quick-frozen entrees with fancy-sounding

names, large food service companies are able to supply restaurants with highly profitable dishes.

You'll pay anywhere from \$8 to \$14 for a chicken Kiev "gourmet dinner" that a restaurant buys frozen and plastic-wrapped for about \$1.10. Frozen veal cordon bleu costs as little as 49 cents per serving before being marked up by the restaurant. And broiled steak luncheon dishes cost restaurants about 58 cents per serving, with or without phony grill marks!

Until recently, at least, the so-called gourmet restaurants were the last holdouts against the tide of food mediocrity and kitchen shortcuts. Most prepared everything, entrees and elaborate sauces, from fresh ingredients. But high labor costs and other economic pressures have forced many into the frozen and canned food camp. Aside from peeking into the kitchen, there's just no way you can know the origin of even the most elegantly-served shrimp scampi or beef bourguignon.

One happy exception to the trend is the rise of natural food restaurants in cities scattered across the country, which are attracting a devoted clientele. "Natural and organic restaurants were common 40 years ago, but it was not necessary to label them so," proclaims one establishment's menu. "All food was fresh and raised naturally, and proprietors were concerned with the quality of the products served and the welfare of the customer."

One of the most recent organic-restaurant arrivals is a spot in New York City called Grass. Natural-food enthusiasts can choose from 125 menu items, from appetizer to dessert. Huge hot stuffed mushroom caps, fresh alfalfa sprouts and salmon steak casserole with sherry sauce are just a few of the mouth-watering possibilities. Herb teas, high-protein salads and a cheesecake made with

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Timely Reminders

Passing on Shoes

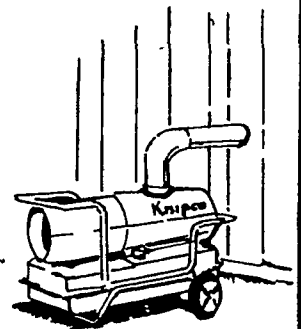
Unlike other articles of clothing, shoes can't be altered to fit. Mrs. Ruth Ann Wilson, Extension clothing and textiles specialist at The Pennsylvania State University, explains that shoes normally stretch and conform to the shape of the foot after several wearings. And once molded to a foot, the shoe won't remold to another. Forcing a child's foot to conform to the shape of a shoe will only cause problems in later years.

Toy Storage

Provide low shelves for toy storage so your child can easily find and select his toys. He'll be able to see them all at one glance. Extension family life specialists at The Pennsylvania State University say that a child who has to work to get his toys by digging through a jumbled toy box can easily become frustrated and lost interest in his toys.

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