

# Healthy Highlights

by Marlisa Brown MS RD CDE CDN

THROUGHOUT THE AGES, DINING OUT HAS been a time when families and friends gather to share special moments while enjoying culinary delights. When everything combines perfectly, the aromas, flavors, decors and sounds create the ultimate dining experience. Today we don't just dine out—we have become a society that eats out, orders in, or drives through at almost every opportunity. This trend of replacing home-cooked food for prepared has been a transition that fits into the multi-tasking lifestyles most of us have become accustomed to. But if everyone is eating out, what options are there for those who are forced to follow regimented diets due to illness or allergies? For these individuals, the dining experience can be frustrating and emotionally draining when limited menu selections provide few choices.

They are not alone. Gone are the days when you would order whatever you wanted from a menu without feeling guilty. Instead, more people are watching what they eat and requesting healthier cuisine. Restaurants that cater to such requests are following in the tradition of true hospitality by giving their customers what they are looking for. The types of requests a restaurant could receive include low fat, low salt, low carbs, vegetarian, food allergies and gluten-free.

Here are some great Long Island restaurants that have successfully provided for their customer's needs.

Let's take a drive to a lovely restaurant, **Grasso's** at 134 Main Street in Cold Spring Harbor. The menu states, "If you would like something for

dinner that is not on your menu tell your server and we will gladly prepare it for you whenever possible." Over the past fourteen years, Gail Grasso has strived to make her customers happy by providing them with a wonderful dining experience. She proudly spoke with me about how knowledgeable her staff is along with Chef Tony Canales who prepares each dish to order using only the freshest ingredients. There are no deep fryers in the kitchen at Grasso's; they only use individual pans, which are essential for preparing meals for those with food allergies (to avoid cross contamination). In addition, when a customer is looking for vegetarian cuisine, there are many choices on the menu to select from such as: Sliced eggplant with tomato and goat cheese in a portabella mushroom or autumn vegetable risotto (a blend of butternut squash with roasted apples, radicchio and sprout leaves). If you are following a low fat diet, you may want to try the grilled chicken breast with fresh rosemary rub or the sea scallops served over a sweet pea puree. Speak to Tony or Gail if you want something special or if you have a food allergy and they will work to create a new exciting option. This restaurant always has a variety of fresh seafood and poultry along with flavorful items like truffle oil and homemade sauces that can be used to spice up any selections. I recommend you visit Grasso's and give them a try. ►



When you are looking for something unusual, it is important to find a restaurant that listens to your needs. One of the most difficult requests to provide for are gluten-free menu options. Gluten is found in wheat, rye and barley. For people following a gluten-free diet, they must avoid regular bread, breadcrumbs, croutons, flour in soups or gravies, bouillon cubes, certain seasoning mixes, regular pasta, flavoring agents that are made with wheat, gluten containing salad dressings and marinades, and foods that are fried in a fryer that cooks anything breaded or batter-dipped. Some say with so many dietary restrictions, they should just eat at home, but people with gluten issues travel, go on vacation, get stuck in meetings, and go to family functions and weddings just like everyone else. If you think this is rare, guess again. It is estimated that in this country alone, 1 in 133 people have problems eating gluten due to celiac disease and more people are getting diagnosed every day. Gluten-free products such as pastas, broths, soy sauce and breads are available but few restaurants offer them, though this pair does.

The first is **Mama's** at 1352 Montauk Hwy in Oakdale across from the Oakdale train station (be careful as there are two Mama's in Oakdale and only one has the gluten-free menu). Owner John Passafiume said that one day a customer informed him she had celiac disease and could no longer order off the menu. John was working with "Barbara" to develop a few gluten-free options when a second customer asked for something special as well. John obliged and the second was so overwhelmed, it moved her to tears. John said, "If

I could do something that would make someone so happy when they dine in my restaurant, I will develop a special gluten-free menu," which he did. John makes homemade gluten free bread, pizzas, lasagna, ravioli, pastas, and has a special area in his kitchen just for gluten-free cooking. He also has a whole array of cannolis, cheesecakes and rice pudding that would make anyone happy. He has noticed his gluten-free calamari is in such high demand, even customers who are not on a gluten-free diet order it. His staff is well trained on how to accommodate customers who follow a gluten-free diet, which makes dining a pleasure for them.

If you live in Nassau County don't despair. **Caffé Baldo** at 2849 Jerusalem Ave in Wantagh also offers a gluten-free menu. It started when owner/chef John Lentini's wife Joanne was diagnosed with celiac disease. When John and Joanne learned of all the restrictions in her diet, they realized how hard it would be for anyone to dine out and decided to develop a gluten-free menu. They worked together revising family favorites; John developed the appetizers and entrées, their son Benny the pizza and garlic knots, and Joanne concentrated on the desserts. They have so many specialties that are gluten-free. Try their mozzarella sticks, baked clams, pasta, pizza, garlic knots and classic Italian selection of desserts including cannolis, cookies and all kinds of cakes. Joanne feels it is important to offer everything from soup to nuts. With the whole family involved in a gluten-free lifestyle, they can easily create a wonderful dining experience. 🍴



## Dining Out? Don't Wing It!

### Low Fat Dining

Ask for low fat dressing or regular dressing on the side and use small amounts.

Ask that little butter and oil be used in the preparation or that wine, broth or tomato sauce be used to flavor your dish instead.

Go for red sauce over cream-based soups and toppings.

If you want a dessert, why not share it with a friend? Or select a sorbet, meringue, low fat ice cream or a fruit.

### For Low Sodium Dining

Stay away from soups made with high sodium broth.

Ask the chef not to add salt to your food and to limit soy sauce and other salty bases.

Request wine and herbs to be used when seasoning your food and ask that veggies and sides be steamed and cooked without adding broth unless made from scratch without adding salt.

### If you have Food Allergies

Ask to speak to the manager to make sure they understand the severity of your allergy. If you have a severe allergy, the chef and manager should be aware to make sure the food served to you is safe for you to eat. In the event that you do accidentally consume a food you are allergic to, you should carry an EpiPen, which your doctor can give you.



### Gluten-Free Dining

Gluten is often hidden in your food; some restaurants put pancake batter in eggs (to make them fuller and fluffy) or add bread to tuna salad (to stretch the tuna). If you want to know, you must ask, they will not mention it unless they know you have a problem. Speak to the chef or manager to make sure the kitchen understands what you can eat. For ethnic restaurants, purchase gluten-free dining cards available in many languages to help them understand what you are trying to say. Always let them know your favorite menu selections and ask if they can be made without wheat, rye or barley. Let them know some of the foods that contain gluten—breadcrumbs, pasta, and flour as well as bouillon cubes, soy sauce, pre-prepared sauces and seasonings. Emphasize that even the smallest amount of gluten can be a problem; if croutons had been in your salad, you can't just take them out or if a sauce had meatballs prepared with breadcrumbs, you can't have the sauce.



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Norman Krieger, piano



Bernstein	Overture to <i>Candide</i>
Copland	<i>Fanfare for the Common Man</i>
Barber	<i>Adagio for Strings</i>
Bernstein/Mason	<i>West Side Story</i> Selections
Joan Tower	<i>Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman</i>
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