

Colorado Restaurants

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Editors: For reprint rights (including updates since some have closed and new healthy restaurants have opened), contact cmwalter@claire-walter.com.

Healthy Restaurant Dining

By Claire Walter

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Dr. Atkins’s protein-laden diet plan is the new-again fad among those who want to shed pounds, regardless of the fat grams, salt content, or preservatives they ingest in the process, but anyone – athletes in particular – concerned with long-term health and well-being recognizes the need for a balanced diet that consists of real food, without chemical enhancements. Happily, many Colorado eateries from quick self-service stops to posh, fine-dining temples offer nutritious menu items made from natural ingredients that can be combined into anyone’s eating plan – without sacrificing taste. In addition to the predictable Mediterranean, Indian, Southeast Asian, and sushi restaurants where you can always find something that won’t mess up your training regimen, here are some Front Range faves.

Fancy Feasts

Alice’s at Gold Lake Resort. Chef Eric Skokan, who presides at this gorgeous dining retreat, is messianic about making everything from scratch, from fresh, natural ingredients. His house-made specialties fuel overnight guests at breakfast, and his full-on gourmet dinners (weekends only) are ideal for a special occasion option. If you’re not staying for the night, arrange to arrive early to ski, run, or bike around the expansive grounds or the nearby Brainard Lake area, and shower in the spa before dinner. 3371 Gold Lake Road, Ward; 303-459-3544.

PanAsia. The small restaurant dishes up a big-flavored lunch and dinner menu primarily of healthy Asian specialties. Carbo-load with great pad Thai or go green with a scrumptious salad. Once a vegetarian emporium, PanAsia now also serves several seafood dishes and a few meats. Its selection of brewed teas is exemplary. 1175 Walnut Street, Boulder; 303-447-0101.

Restaurant Kody. Owner/chef Adam Mali’s from-scratch kitchen turns out everything from the bread to the ice cream and sorbet. The constantly changing dinner menu lists no more than eight each of appetizers, entrées, and desserts, all made from fresh, natural ingredients, when possible from Colorado. Preparation is perfect in its simplicity. Chef Mali will tailor any dish to a customer’s wishes or dietary needs. So go ahead. Order those grilled Niman Ranch lamb spareribs with something other than potato *gratin*. At

\$27, the three-course, *prix fixe* menu (Wednesdays, through winter) is a steal. 1552 Bergen Parkway, Evergreen; 303-670-6223, www.restaurantkody.com.

Rudi's World Cuisine. Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, Rudi's is back under former owners John and Susan Fontaine. The eclectic multicultural menu highlights Indian, Greek, Italian, Thai, and Moroccan favorites. These well-executed, from-scratch dishes are made with filtered water, local organic produce when available, and hormone-free meats, served at lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. 4720 Table Mesa Drive, Boulder; 303-494-5858, www.rudismenu.com.

Sunflower. Owner/chef John Pell, who practices "natural fine dining," weaves free-range poultry and ranch-raised game, hormone-free meats, fresh seafood, grains, pasta, and organic produce into artful and healthful dishes. He uses non-aluminum utensils and cooks with filtered water. Even the wines are organic. Don't miss the mid-day salad bar. The à la carte weekend brunch won't tax your willpower the way a brunch buffet might. 1701 Pearl Street, Boulder; 303-440-0220.

The Warehouse. Chef James Africano's sophisticated cuisine is served in the brew-pub setting of the Palmer Lake Brewing Company at lunch and dinner. Both menus feature large or small salads and an assortment of light grilled entrées. The vegetarian fusilli – a toothsome medley of corkscrew pasta tossed with forest mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes, asparagus tips, pine nuts, and fresh spinach – is pumped up with garlic, shallots, and roasted red pepper *coulis*. 25 West Cimarron Street, Colorado Springs; 719-475-8880, www.thewarehouserestaurant.com.

Wild Basin Lodge. The restaurant at this small lodge, convenient to the Wild Basin and Longs Peak trailheads, has lightened its dinner menu. They've upped their vegetarian options from two to six, added low-carb and heart-healthy dishes, and cut down on salt and heavy cream. The Colorado red trout with rice pilaf and fresh sautéed vegetables, is a winner, especially if you ask them to go light on the *remoulade* sauce. 1130 County Road 84 West, Allenspark; 303-747-2274, www.wildbasinlodge.com.

Culinary Mid-Fielders

Adam's Mountain Café. A funky, slightly retro ambience serves as the backdrop for a healthy, whole-grain, meatless menu, conceived with thought and prepared with care by owner/chef Farley Kaminer. Founded in 1984, the restaurant serves world cuisine, with abundant pasta and Southwestern dishes (try the veggie or turkey burrito in a whole-wheat tortilla). Adam's serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. 110 Cañon Avenue, Manitou Springs; (719) 685-1430, www.adamsmountain.com.

Kabul Kabob. This classy Afghan joint serves up skewered and char-grilled chicken, lamb, and beef, with veggies interspersed, of course, and served with perfect long-grain rice and a traditional central Asian flatbread called *naan*. 11002 East Yale Avenue, Aurora; 303-750-6020.

Max Burgerworks. If you can resist the yummy hand-cut fries, the hand-dipped onion rings, and the opulent, high-fat toppings and stick to a simple 7-ounce burger (Niman Ranch beef, no less) on a whole-grain bun, you have a protein hit on a high-fiber foundation. Burgers of organic chicken, salmon, or portabella mushrooms are meatless options. Add a crisp salad to complete a well-balanced meal. 1512 Larimer Street, Denver; 303-534-0944, www.maxburgerworks.com.

Organic Earth Café. A 1904 Victorian is a haven for vegetarians and vegans, with more than 100 items on the menu. Wash down the delicious house-made soups, baked goods, sandwiches, and desserts with power drinks, smoothies, or organic wines, beers, or mixed drinks. For caffeine, belly up to the espresso bar. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served. Nightly entertainment ranges from “tantric hip-hop” to open-mike poetry. 1124 Manitou Avenue, Manitou Springs; 719-685-0986, www.organicearthcafe.com.

13th Street Wine Bar. Some of us do not live by food alone, but like a glass of wine and civilized setting – and perhaps music too. This year-old establishment serves grilled *paninis*, great salads with optional light dressings, wraps, and personal-size pizzas. And the wine is fine too. 13th & Washington Streets, Golden; 303-271-0730, www.13thstwinebar.com.

Turley’s. Many native Boulderites cut their teeth and honed their tastes for healthy foods at this long-time local favorite, which serves all-day breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The menu abounds with nutritious, and very P.C., items, with salads, soups, sandwiches, entrées, and breakfast items served in training table-size portions. In addition to organic everything, herbal teas, smoothies, tofu from White Wave, and baked goods from Great Harvest, Turley’s has found a way to make the nutritional best of comfort food too. 2350 Arapahoe Avenue, Boulder; 303-442-2800.

Fast and Fabulous

Biryani Bistro & Kabab Kourt. This fast-food, limited-menu Indian eatery near the University of Colorado trims the fat from the meat used in biryani and tandoori dishes, made with as little fat or oil as possible. It is open for weekend breakfast and lunch, and weekday lunch and early dinners, but closed in mid-afternoon. 1310 College Avenue, Boulder; 303-807-9362.

Blue Sky Café & Juice Bar. Wheat-free pancakes, yolk-less omelets with low-fat cheese, meatless sausages, and natural chicken and beef for health-conscious carnivores are available for breakfast, brunch, and lunch seven days a week. The to-order juices and juice blends are super. After café closes, owner Tina Trammell pushes back the tables, swabs down the hardwood floor, and teaches yoga in the same space. 14403 West Colfax Avenue, Lakewood; 303-216-2670, www.blueskyyoga.com.

Café Prasad. This simple, self-service café in a side room off the Boulder Cooperative Food Market offers a small, totally natural, and fully vegetarian menu. Salad bar and hot bar items are priced by weight. Sandwiches, freshly baked goods, and natural beverages are also available. 1904 Pearl Street; Boulder; 303-447-2667; www.bouldercoop.org.

Herb'n Farm. There's just one Colorado location for an innovative chain designed for college campuses (and closed during break periods). It serves healthy renditions of such college comfort foods as burgers, wraps, sandwiches, soups, chili, salads, and fresh-baked, guilt-free desserts, juices, smoothies, coffee, and teas. The self-described "clean cuisine" is naturally low in fat, cholesterol and sodium, and high in fiber and health-promoting nutrients. Nutritional analyses are on every menu item, with icons denoting certified organic, non-dairy, wheat-free, and vegan. McHugh Commons (known as "The Q"), 1090 North Cascade Avenue, Colorado Springs; 719-389-7000.

Kate's Restaurant. This boutique restaurant in an old Victorian carefully assembles midweek lunches and Sunday brunch from fresh ingredients and without oil or butter and the presence. If there's a muffin on the menu, order it. 3435 Albion Street, Denver; 303-333-4816.

Manitou Natural. This mostly take-out store has a few window seats if you can't wait to dig into the house-made soups, salads, sandwiches, and entrées. Organic produce, natural meats and poultry, and whole grains and baked goods abound. 56 Park Avenue, Manitou Springs; 719-685-0986.

Masa Grill. From a big breakfast burrito to a rice-filled burrito bomb for dinner, you can fuel up fast and for a pittance at this informal eatery. Lighter options are the Mexican salad (romaine lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, corn, and chilies) or marinated, grilled vegetable tacos, available in soft tortillas. The servers custom-assemble every dish – with or without cheese, sour cream, avocado, and so forth. Choose salsa as spicy or mild as you like. 1265 Alpine Avenue, Boulder; 303-440-9511.

Pressto Sandwiches. Grilled *panini*, including a large vegetarian selection and a choice of whole wheat or white focaccia bread, star in this sprightly fast-service establishment that is a lunch-hour hit. The salads are fresh and tasty, and if you need more protein, they'll gladly double up the chicken. 555 Seventeenth Street, Denver; 303-294-0449. 1700 Broadway, Denver; 720-917-8100. 1035 Walnut, Boulder; 303-444-6786.

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The Chain Gang

Like it or not, chains are here to stay. When it comes to healthy eating options, some are better than others – but even the fastest of the fast-fooderies are trying to lighten up their menus with some (relatively healthy choices) -- witness Subway's multi-million-dollar ad campaign boasting about its low-carb sandwiches. A better bet is one of Colorado's natural-foods supermarkets with seating areas for consuming salad bar offerings, prepared food, and baked goods. Wild Oats (www.wildoats.com) has 15 Front Range locations, and Whole Foods (www.wholefoods.com) is in Boulder, Denver, Cherry Creek, and Highlands Ranch.

Self-service or semi-self-service food dispensaries are all the rage. Denver-based Chipotle Grill (www.chipotle.com), a so-called "partner brand" of McDonald's, dishes up 20-ounce burritos at 20 Front Range restaurants. Similar carbo-rich burritos are the

order of the day at Z-Teca Mexican Grill (Aurora, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Denver, Englewood, Glendale, Golden, Greenwood Village, and elsewhere) and Illegal Pete's (www.illegalpetes.com), a relative small fry with two outlets in Boulder and one in downtown Denver.

At this writing, Boulder-based Noodles & Company (www.noodles.com) was dishing out noodles from all nations at 27 Front Range locations. The Big Bowl Asian Kitchen (www.bigbowl.com) has four Denver-area locations that specialize in wok-tossed dishes prepared to order from fresh ingredients. All of these chain outposts offer abundant options that are quite healthy, but as always, it's up to you to make wise and suitable choices. – C.W.

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