

Remember when a slice of cheesecake was a modest wedge about an inch-or-so high? The Cheesecake Factory Ultimate Red Velvet Cake Cheesecake has one of those wedges. In fact, it has two. They alternate with two wedges of red velvet cake, each of which probably contains a cupcake's worth of cake.

So now you're up to two slices of cheesecake plus two cupcakes...plus cream cheese frosting plus white chocolate shavings plus a small silo of whipped cream. Plus sizes are just a step away!

Each hefty slice (the ones we bought averaged close to three-quarters of a pound) brings 1,540 calories and 59 grams of saturated fat (three days' worth) to your dessert plate. That's impressive, even for The Cheesecake Factory. Only the Reese's Peanut Butter Chocolate Cake Cheesecake has more calories $(1,610)$, though its sat fat falls 18 grams short of the Ultimate's.

It would take two servings of the restaurant's generous Original Cheesecake to equal one Ultimate Red Velvet. An entire tub ( $11 / 2$ quarts) of Breyers All Natural Homemade Vanilla ice cream has 1,680 calories and 60 grams of sat fat, for heaven's sake.

Whose fat cells have room for 1,540 calories after dinner? They oughta rename the place The Cheesecake Fattory.

## Built-In Bacon

"Hickory-smoked bacon is blended right into the beef to make our burgers juicy and delicious with bacon flavor in every bite." That's how IHOP describes its new line of Bacon 'N Beef Burgers.

Finally. A chain has figured out how to help its patrons eat more food with less chewing. Why bother slapping bacon slabs on top of your burger, when you can grind them right into the meat? Makes 'em go down nice and smooth.

And that makes it easier for you to swallow the Mon-
ster Bacon 'N Beef Cheeseburger, which delivers
not one, but "two thick, juicy, Bacon 'N Beef burger patties smothered with American and Provolone cheeses on a Romano-Parmesan bun." How thoughtful. One thick, juicy, bacon-infused burger would almost certainly leave you hungry in a few hours.

The tab: 1,250 calories and two days' worth of saturated fat ( 42 grams), with a bonus 1,590 milligrams of sodium (a day's supply, thanks in part to the bacon). And don't forget the sides, which range from fresh fruit ( 80 calories) to onion rings ( 620 calories). That leaves seasoned fries ( 300 calories) somewhere in the middle, which is where your Monster Bacon 'N Beef Burger will likely make its future home.

## Meltdown

"Four fried mozzarella sticks and melted American cheese grilled between two slices of sourdough bread." That's how
Denny's menu describes its Fried Cheese Melt, which is "served with wavy-cut French fries and a side of marinara sauce."

It's "grilled cheese with a twist," says Denny's. Sure sounds like "the same old cheese and bread repackaged into a new sandwich" to us. What's next? A Cheese Nachos sandwich? A Cheese Fries Melt? (A fries melt might be a tough sell with a side of fries, but you never know.)

There's a simple elegance to a dish like the Fried Cheese Melt: mozzarella cheese sticks coated with breading, embedded in melted cheese, and served between two slices of white bread toast with tomato sauce on the side.

It's as elegant as 1,260 calories (mostly from the fries and the refined carbs in the bread and breading), plus enough cheese to supply 21 grams of saturated fat (a day's worth). And don't forget the two days' sodium ( 3,010 milligrams).

All for just \$4. "The possibilities are wide open," says Denny's Web site. They're wide, all right.

## Belly Burger

It's not easy to make your burger stand out these days. Adding cheese, onion rings, or an extra burger are old tricks.

You've got to be creative, like The Cheesecake Factory. Its Farmhouse Cheeseburger is "topped with grilled smoked pork belly, cheddar cheese, onions, lettuce, tomato, mayo and a fried egg." (Get it? You'd find the egg in a farmhouse and the big-bellied pig in a pen nearby.)

The Cheesecake Factory isn't the first chain to slap an egg on a burger. Red Robin calls its Royal Red Robin Burger "the aristocrat of all burgers because we crown it with a fresh fried egg." IHOP's Bacon 'N Beef Bacon \& Egg Cheeseburger includes "one egg over medium." And you can get Denny's Bacon Slamburger with an "egg cooked to order."

But the pork belly—thick slabs of bacon—helps make those bacon burgers look skimpy. The Farmhouse brings 1,530 calories and 36 grams of saturated fat seasoned with 3,210 milligrams of sodium to your insides. And that's without the 460 calories and $1,460 \mathrm{mg}$ of sodium in the fries.

Suggested tag line: From our pork belly to yours.

## Shakedown

"Your Health—Just as Important as Taste," says the hard-to-find "Nutritional Information \& Ingredients" page on the Cold Stone Creamery Web site.

That's a comfort, since the chain is all about the "Ultimate Ice Cream Experience." It's "the place to indulge your ice cream dreams."
Take the Founder's Favorite Signature Cre-ation-ice cream, pecans, brownie, fudge, and caramel. A large ("Gotta Have It") in a choc-olate-dipped waffle cone or bowl has 1,590 calories and 42 grams of saturated fat.

Clearly, health is Cold Stone's No. 1 priority. But the chain's ice cream shakes take health to
a new level. A "Gotta Have It" PB\&C Shake (peanut butter, chocolate, and milk), for example, squeezes a full day's calories $(2,010)$ and $31 / 2$ days' worth of sat fat ( 68 grams) into each 24 fl . oz. plastic cup.
Granted, that doesn't sound so healthy, what with so many adults and children either overweight or obese. But what about those who aren't? Their fat cells and artery linings may not yet be packed solid. And don't forget the underweight.
Don't worry. Cold Stone's got them covered. Even a 16 fl. oz. small ("Like It") PB\&C Shake has 1,280 calories.

See? Cold Stone cares.

## Getting Stuffed

"Provolone cheese-stuffed meatballs braised in a rich marinara sauce with a hint of crushed red pepper, layered over tender fettuccine pasta lightly blended with Parmesan cream sauce," croons Applebee's menu.

Lightly? The menu shouldn't print that word within a sixinch radius of the chain's Provolone-Stuffed Meatballs

## With Fettuccine.

Each serving of pasta (four cups at the Applebee's we visited) plus garlic bread harbors 1,520 calories and 43 grams of saturated fat (two days' worth), with a side of $11 / 2$ teaspoons
of sodium (3,700 milligrams). It's like eating two of Applebee's 12 oz. Ribeye Steaks plus a side of Garlic Mashed Potatoes. Yum.

Your waistline and arteries may want to know why pasta needs both a marinara and a Parmesan cream sauce. Way back in the pre-obesity-epidemic 1970s, pasta came dressed with a single sauce. And meatballs needed no cheese stuffing.

But that was before the dairy industry started a campaign to get restaurants to work more cheese into their menus. Whether the dairy pushers urged Applebee's to stuff its meatballs with cheese, we don't know. But once customers get used to seeing cheese on sandwiches, salads, soups, and pastas, restaurants may not need any prompting to cheese-up even more dishes.

At some Applebee's, for example, you can get the provolonestuffed meatballs in a Stuffed Meatball Sandwich (1,090 calories, 28 grams of sat fat, $3,540 \mathrm{mg}$ of sodium). And you can add chili cheese fries on the side for an extra dollar or two (plus an extra 550 calories, 11 grams of sat fat, and $1,500 \mathrm{mg}$ of sodium).

Nice.

According to Great Steak, an extra-large order of Great Fries weighs roughly $11 / 3$ pounds and delivers 930 calories and 2,490 milligrams of sodium to hips, bellies, and blood vessels that probably have too much of both.

But that's not enough for the Great Steak folks. Not when they can sell Great Fries topped with Philly Cheese (Cheese Fries), or with Philly Cheese and chili (Coney Island Fries), or with Philly Cheese and jalapeño peppers (Nacho Fries), or, last but nowhere near least, with Philly Whiz, chopped bacon, and sour cream \& chives (King Fries).

An extra-large King Fries (which isn't available at all locations) dispatches 1,500 calories to your overcrowded fat depots and $4,980 \mathrm{mg}$ of sodium (more than three days' worth) to your rapidly aging blood vessels. And all that cheese, bacon, and sour cream makes sure that the saturated fat reaches 33 grams. It's like eating three McDonald's Quarter Pounders with Cheese sprinkled with two-thirds of a teaspoon of salt.

Nothing like a light snack at the mall.

