

Healthy restaurant options for Chicago area athletes

By Claire Zulkey

Just because you're training doesn't mean that all your meals need to come out of a blender. Chicago is a city teeming with restaurants offering meals of every ethnicity, price and size, so there are several which are ideal for athletes who want to treat their taste buds without derailing their diet and fitness plan. We spoke with Julie Burns, nutrition counselor for the Chicago Bulls and Blackhawks, and Monique Ryan, local nutrition therapist, about their top recommendations for athletes looking to dine out. Their choices are based on healthy atmosphere, knowledgeable staff, nutritious options, and, of course, taste factor. Here are ten for you to try after (or before) your workout.

1. Wishbone

1001 W. Washington Blvd. 312-850-2663

Average Entree: \$8-\$15

Underrated Menu Item: *Hoppin' John (Blackeye peas and rice.)*

Best Reason to eat here: Complimentary corn muffins

"The most important thing for my athletes is that they get a colorful plate, not just meat and potatoes," says Julie Burns, founder of SportFuel. At this Southern-style eatery, Burns is a fan of Wishbone's healthful offering of greens plus comfort food options that can soothe the soul but not necessarily burst an artery. Like roasted chicken in red pepper sauce or blackened catfish. Freshly squeezed juice and smoothies are offered in the funky, down-home atmosphere, as well as good vegetarian options. Plus, at this location, situated near Harpo studios, you may catch a glimpse of an Oprah guest or two as you dine.

2. Ina's

1235 W. Randolph St. 312-226-8227

Average Entree: \$8-\$15

Underrated Menu Item: *Vegetable hash*

Best Reason to eat here: *Organic beef and vegetables, lots of vegetarian options.*

Looking for a healthy breakfast that doesn't come served in a bowl or in bar form? Burns gives this friendly establishment a thumbs up. "They offer different milk alternatives for those who are lactose intolerant or avoiding dairy." Breathe easy: Ina's is smoke free and cell-phone free and provides bike racks for those on the move, always a good first step for those seeking a healthy dining alternative. In the warm weather, grab a seat at its sidewalk café



and catch a breath of fresh air while you dine. Ina's breakfast foods, like scrapple and vegetable hash, are made with fresh ingredients; even if you must order pancakes, you can get a less sinful variation with their whole-wheat oatmeal option. Plus, Ina's is kid friendly, so bring the family along.

3. Corner Bakery/Maggiarino's Little Italy

several locations/ 516 N. Clark St. 312-644-7700.

Average Entree: \$8-\$15

Underrated Menu Item: Italian salad

Best Reason to eat here: Shells with roasted vegetables.

Surprisingly, Burns endorses these potential carbohydrate and sweet fests. The Corner Bakery chain is known for fast salads, pastas, soups and pizzas and Maggiano's boasts king sized family portions of pastas and salads to share and huge individual portions eat solo in its friendly, noisy interior. "You can eat unhealthy at these restaurants, but you can find healthy options, too. They offer salads with ingredients like cranberries and rice." At either establishment, large, filling salads are a good option, plus Maggiano's offers a several non-pasta dishes, although the vegetarian lasagna is laden with huge, chunky veggies. Burns is a fan of the Lettuce Entertain You restaurants in general, where one can usually find healthy, tasty options.

4. Wildfire

159 W. Erie St 312-787-9000

Average Entree: \$15-\$25

Underrated Menu Item: Hand-stuffed olives in the martinis

Best Reason to eat here: Blue cheese crusted filet

Mad cow disease be damned! Chicago is a town for staunch meat eaters, and Wildfire, another Lettuce Entertain You venue, is the place to go to have your lean cut cooked in the wood burning stove and rotisserie, instead of fried. Plus, if you're on a particular diet, your server is likely to be helpful in picking out foods for you. "The waitstaff there is very knowledgeable about food allergies," says Burns, of the restaurant, where the dark, wood-laden décor tends to be just as big a hit with patrons as the food. Burns adds, "And they offer a nice array of vegetables," as well as seafood options, just in case you're not a meat-eater.

5. Riva

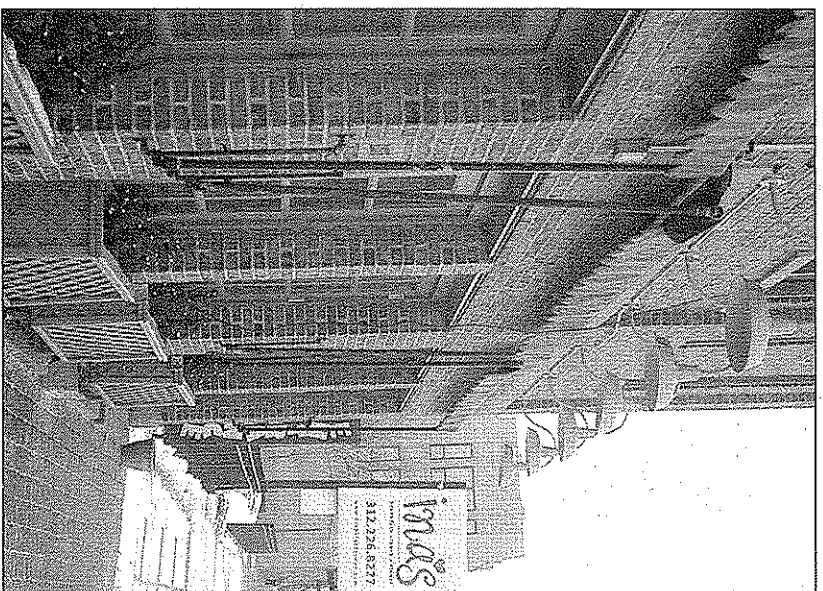
700 E. Grand Ave 312-644-7482

Average Entree: \$15-\$25

Underrated Menu Item: Lobster Bisque

Best Reason to eat here: Surf n' Turf

If you're looking to stick with chains, Burns also gives Phil Stefan's restaurants the thumbs-up and recommends this swankier seafood restaurant as an example. "I also look for a good seafood selection when I look for restaurants for my clients, with an offering of wild salmon instead of farm raised, for instance," Burns says. Riva offers a wide variety of selections from the sea, with a breathtaking view of



Ina's on Chicago's near west side is a good choice for breakfast or lunch.

North Pier. Snag a table by the window and watch the fireworks from the pier as you eat your tuna filet or king crab legs (just go easy on the butter.)

6. Sai Café

2010 N. Sheffield Ave. (773) 472-8080

Average Entree: \$8-\$15

Underrated Menu Item: Green tea ice cream

Best Reason to eat here: Toro tuna

If you like your fish uncooked, the supplies at Sai Café are replenished once a day to ensure freshness. At this busy Lincoln Park sushi joint, the selection is huge, with 30-piece a la carte sushi list and 22 hand rolls. For those sushi novices, Sai Café is a warm, friendly locale so you can relax and try new dishes without feeling like a yoker. Try vegetarian rolls, salads, or teriyaki if you're not a fish fan, and the edamame (steamed soy beans) is as addictive and fun to eat as popcorn, only with vitamins—be sure to ask for it light on the salt.

7. Heartland Café

7000 N. Glenwood Ave 773-465-8005

Average Dinner Entree: Under \$8

Underrated Menu Item: Buffalo Sobá Plate (whole wheat noodles with roast buffalo sirloin)

Best Reason to eat here: The "general store" and live music.

"Good Wholesome Food for the Mind and Body" is this eatery's motto, serving up food for thought and stomach. Despite its crunchy image, there are plenty of huge portions, sweet desserts and cholesterol-filled breakfast options with which to go astray, so choose wisely. Plenty of choices are available for meat eaters, such as the turkey burgers on a whole-wheat bun, and for vegetarians, this has

Healthy Fast Food

Staying healthy while in a hurry

We're not trying to bag on fast food here. But let's be realistic, some of the popular choices at the corner burger joint can provide a gut-busting 1,500 calories in a single meal. (That's 3/4 of the recommended daily intake in one meal, folks.)

To their credit, many national chains have worked hard to offer health-conscious diners some lower-calorie fare. When you have to hit the fast food chains, take a look at the following options.

McDonald's: Sure, a Big Mac and super-sized fries dish out 1,200 calories. But a 10-oz. Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad tips the scales at a trim 200 calories with only 9 grams of fat. A Chicken McGrill and a side salad comes in at 420 calories. Check nutrition info at www.mcdonalds.com.

Chipotle: OK, the food here tends to be large, so you may want to split it with a friend. But on the bright side, their vegetarian alternatives are real alternatives. If you're trimming back on oils, stay away from the fajitas. Try the chicken burrito, ease back on the guac and sour cream, and you'll be low on fat but still long on taste.

Noodles and Company: This place is a Godsend for active athletes. Atkins be damned, if you're exercising, you need complex carbohydrates, and noodles are some of the best. Order the Japanese pan noodles without oil and you're looking at only 2 grams of fat. Low carbs and flavor? Try Spicy Peanut Noodle Salad. N&C breaks down the nutrition 411 for you at www.noodles.com.

Panera Bread: Panera offers an array of sandwiches, and some include plenty of fat, so take a look at the ingredients. Drop the mayo from the Tuscan Chicken or hold the dressing on the Turkey Bravo, and you'll come in under budget. The wide selection of salads can be slimmed down by requesting dressing on the side, and using it sparingly. Check out nutritional info at www.panera.com.

Subway: Sure, the Jared thing is getting a bit old. And no, this isn't gourmet fare. But on the other hand, Subway is everywhere, and by avoiding cheese, mayo and dressing, you can get a decent meal that won't go straight to your love handles. The sinful-sounding Honey Mustard Ham has only 5 grams of fat and 310 calories. To cut calories even more, forgo the bread for a salad and watch the dressing. Nutrition information lives at www.subway.com.

been a mecca for years. Plus, the lively, community feel of the restaurant is good for anyone looking for a dining establishment with a little more...heart.

8. The Hearty Boys Café

3404 N. Halsted St. (773) 244-9866

Average Dinner Entrée: Under \$8

Underrated Menu Item: *French country larts*

Best Reason to eat here: *Every menu option is homemade.*

For those looking for a less expensive option, this Boystown café was opened by a catering company and offers tasty, creative meals for bargain prices. Serving up fun salads, soups brunch and quiches plus unique spins on sandwiches, like wasabi-lime tuna salad, the Hearty Boys Café has an intimate, warm interior (even the bathrooms are whimsical), with friendly service. If you absolutely loved your meal at the Hearty Boys, cooking classes are offered, so you can learn how to create their offerings at home. Plus, it's BYOB and smoke free, so without spirits to lull you into a food haze the general haze of smoke, the Hearty Boys is a healthy, happy dining experience.

9. Lulus

804 Davis St., Evanston 847-869-4343

Average Dinner Entrée: Under \$8

Underrated Menu Item: *Thai curry and noodles*

Best Reason to eat here: *Slur fry options loaded with veggies*

Nutritionist Monique Ryan recommends this friendly, funky "dim sum and then sum," located

blocks from the Davis El and movie theater, featuring Pan-Asian cuisine. "They have fresh foods, healthy oils, wholesome carbohydrates, no MSG, and both vegetarian and meat-containing dishes which have reasonable amounts of protein." Even more importantly, the food is delish. Choose from a variety including of soups, salads and rice dishes or go for the Bento Box, which combines several favorites, including chicken salad and steamed spinach.

10. Orange

3231 N. Clark St. 773-549-4400

Average Entrée: \$10

Underrated Menu Item: *Hot salmon hash*

Best Reason to eat here: *Little touches like napkins tied with string, magazine-style menu and cucumber slices in the water.*

If you can't wait for Sundays for brunch, it's probably to your advantage at this breakfast joint, which gets packed during typical brunch hours. Your best bet is to stop in on a weekday or extra early or late on the weekends. With unique spins on traditional brunch dishes, (think 'green eggs,' made with pesto) Orange is fresh and fun. Get your morning (or afternoon) burst of vitamins at their juice bar located in the middle of the restaurant, and treat your eyes and mouth to frushi. Orange's gorgeous fruit and rice concoctions, with different selections made daily. While their pancake flights tend to be on the sugary, syrupy side, they're inventive and always made fresh, so maybe just a little taste won't hurt you. O

Breakfast Favorites

Looking for a place to meet after that morning run? Try these favorites.

Walker Bros. Pancake House

153 Green Bay Rd., Wilmette
847-251-6000

Known for their way around a pancake griddle, Walker Bros. has created a loyal following in Chicago suburbs. Although the wait can be long on the weekends, it is the perfect stop for breakfast after a long bike ride or jog.

Extremely fast service keeps your meal moving, but beware the petite glasses of freshly squeezed OJ. Don't expect to spend more than \$10 on favorites that include the baked apple pancake, banana pancake and any of the offered omelets.

Although the restaurant on Green Bay Rd. is the original, Walker Bros. Pancake Houses litter the Chicago suburban landscape.

Egg Harbor Café

11 Suburban Locations
www.eggharborcafe.com

With various suburban locations, the fresh juice and egg skillet always have customers returning to this laidback eatery.

Start your day with such options as the Garden Delight Omelet, Joe's Healthy Scrambler or the Low Carb Benedict. Breakfast doesn't strike your fancy? Try the Santa Fe Chicken Salad Roll-Ups or California Club as a morning alternative. If you have kids, Egg Harbor offers up a comprehensive children's menu.

Open from 6:30am until 2:00pm daily, the restaurant is constantly full of customers but the noise never reaches a disturbing level. Visit their website for all of Egg Harbor's locations

Eglectic Café

145 N. Hale, Wheaton
630-690-9001

In the heart of downtown Wheaton, not far from mile zero of the Prairie Path, Eglectic café offers simple breakfast fare along with a plethora of inventive brunch items.

While this restaurant can be packed on the weekends, the eggs offered at Eglectic are worth the crowds. The Calypso Omelet with avocado and bacon is amazing, and the Scrambled Egg Beaters offer a healthy alternative to the dense, yet wonderful, Banana's Foster Pancake. Prices average \$8, and I would suggest ordering multiple items to sharing among friends. If you can't find parking, you can always order for a fast pick-up. Or, better yet, ride your bike.

Vegetarian Options

Sure, you can get good vegetarian dishes at many restaurants, but these folks make it a specialty.

Chicago Diner

3411 N. Halsted St.

773-935-6696, www.veggiediner.com

Chicago's best-known vegetarian restaurant offers a number of dishes that appeal to everyone, from vegans to those who simply enjoy a healthy, fresh meal. Some of the favorites include their meatless version of shepherd's pie, the No. Meata Fajita and a grilled cheese sandwich that offers more veggies than cheese. For breakfast lovers, try the Tofu Scrambler Jubilee. Their popular vegan cakes, which are dairy and egg free and contain no saturated fat or cholesterol, are excellent. You can also find some of their desserts locally at Whole Foods.

Blind Faith Café

525 Dempster St., Evanston 847-328-6875

While the name of this vegetarian café may not inspire trust, one taste of the fresh ingredients will certainly win converts. Incorporating seitan and tofu into a variety of recipes, vegetarians and non-vegans alike can appreciate dishes such as the fajitas, tofu satay and potato-bean enchiladas. After dinner, do not forget to pick-up some bakery goodies, including their decadent flourless chocolate cake and gigantic chocolate-chip cookies. In order to fully enjoy this café, it is necessary to have a taste for adventure and \$15 in your pocket.

Located in Evanston, parking can be a hassle on weekends, but weeknights shouldn't offer a challenge.



Chicago Diner features excellent vegetarian entrees, as well as vegan desserts.