

## Lean, green eating machine

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Experts swear chocolate is healthful. And nuts are full of protein. Justifying that New Year's Eve champagne, however, can prove challenging. Not to mention the accompanying hangover cure -- greasy eggs, sausage and 12 slices of white bread slathered in butter (give or take). The remedy? More eating out, obviously. Herewith, utterly painless, good-for-you choices for lunch, brunch and dinner.

Lettuce Eatery. Healthy investments may be their bread and butter, but when it comes to caloric capital Bay Streeters prefer leaner lunchtime options. Thus the success of the Lettuce Eatery, an upscale salad bar with 70 items. For \$5.95, waistline watchers can top romaine, mesclun, iceberg or spinach with four basics. Or there are chefs' concoctions such as the 10 Vegetable Salad (\$8.25). Still, we like our very own "Scout Salad" (a twist on the niçoise salad) best -- light poppy-seed dressing over spinach, cherry tomatoes, artichokes, olives, potato, crumbled egg and shrimp (\$9.45).

Guilty pleasure: Peanut-butter-and-chocolate-chip cookie (\$2.00).

Where: TD Centre, 100 Wellington St. W., [416-304-0090](tel:416-304-0090); 53 Bloor St. E., [416-925-5617](tel:416-925-5617); plus another location opening mid-February at Richmond Street and Spadina Avenue.

Live Organic Food Bar. Since its revamp last year, this tiny organic bistro evokes something between a Chelsea eatery on Prozac and a very chic carrot patch. Orange metal tables sport cutouts in the shape of sprouts and the melon-green walls are decorated with inspirational phrases. The menu -- which changes every two weeks -- is equally inventive. In addition to meals made "with the help of the stove" such as lentil shepherd's pie (\$10), entirely raw dishes can be ordered à la carte or as a combo (\$13.50). While these plates are full of faux-foods such as zucchini "linguine" and buckwheat "pizza," the taste packs real punch.

Guilty pleasure: Rich walnut-apricot torte (\$5.50).

Where: 264 Dupont St., [416-515-2002](tel:416-515-2002).

Fressen. Exposed stone, sensuous tree murals and a massive centrefold shot of celery in a brushed-steel frame make this the ultimate detox date spot. And dishes from the former chef at Taro are as dramatic as the decor -- spinach blini (\$8) are piled high between layers of avocado salsa; black-bean wraps (\$15) are served in a delicate pastry along with artfully carved veggies. The best items here may be the simplest, though: The juicy grilled portobello mushroom on rosti is an aphrodisiac unto itself (\$15).

Guilty pleasure: Belgian chocolate and Johnny Walker with steamed soy milk (\$6.95).

Where: 478 Queen St. W., [416-504-5127](tel:416-504-5127).

Fresh by Juice for Life. With three restaurants and two cookbooks to her name, Ruth Tal Brown is the reigning queen of Toronto's veggie vanguard. At her Annex HQ, healthy fixes include an almond, grain and tofu burger with spicy peanut sauce (\$7) and the ever-popular Big Salad -- a huge bowl of baby greens with avocado, cukes, tomato, carrot, red peppers and hulled hemp seeds (\$8). There are also juice mixes galore: from the crowd-pleasing Breathless, a mango, banana and strawberry smoothie (\$4.50/473 ml), to the "flu fighter," hot juice with garlic, lemon, ginger, cayenne and echinacea (\$6/473 ml).

Guilty pleasure: Sweet-potato fries with miso gravy (\$6.50).

Where: 521 Bloor St. W., [416-531-2635](tel:416-531-2635); 894 Queen St. West, [416-913-2720](tel:416-913-2720); 147 Spadina Ave, [416-599-4442](tel:416-599-4442).

Sandwich Box. It's hard to walk right past the Ben & Jerry's that fronts this food court. And the smell of those pizza slices down the hallway is alluring. But there's a reason the hipsters across the street at MuchMusic line up at this sandwich bar (and it's not just a fear of that extra 10 pounds on-camera). For \$5.95, take-out here includes Ace Bakery bread with savoury spreads, three gourmet toppings and a side salad in a pristine white box. We find whole wheat grilled with chicken, garlic and cumin spread, asiago cheese and roasted sweet peppers particularly winning. Or sample the salad bar for \$1.65 per 100 grams.

Guilty pleasure: Crème brûlée (\$3.25).

Where: 238 Queen St. W., [416-204-9411](tel:416-204-9411).

Pulp Kitchen. For a cruelty-free brunch in Leslieville, this funkified vegan diner is not to be missed. Regulars' favourites include oatmeal with raisins, vanilla and caramelized banana (\$6.95) and the PK Sandwich, crispy breaded tofu, roasted tomato, avocado and cilantro Dijon mayo on flax bread that comes with a salad and roasted potatoes (\$9.95). And, for those not scared off by its shocking green tint, the Detox Darling -- apple, kale, lemon, wheatgrass and milk thistle (\$5.25) -- is a light and refreshing chaser.

Guilty pleasure: Blueberry pancakes with a coconut banana crème topping (\$7.95).

Where: 898 Queen St. E., [416-461-4612](tel:416-461-4612).

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