

The Quest for Healthy Low-Carb Fast Food

Shôn Ellerton, December 9, 2022

Trying to find something to eat which is healthy and low carb in a fast food environment is not only difficult, but very frustrating.



I'm hungry and as I didn't bring anything to eat into work, it's a little trip to the food court over the road or to the supermarket. What will I find there? Plenty of choices you might ponder, but for those seeking food low in carbs or sugar, it is both challenging and frustrating. I've been following this low-carb diet for a few years now, and, in combination with working out, I've never felt better. Well, at least since my late twenties when I was a bit of a fitness nut.

I didn't fancy the supermarket option as it has become somewhat boring, the obvious choice being that of a pre-cooked chicken, a bit of smoked salmon, or a can of tuna. Therefore, I wander around some of the food courts in central Adelaide, and I'll say, there're quite a few of them with a wide variety of food from many different nationalities. There're dumplings, burgers, fried chicken, Chinese food, Indian food, sandwich shops, doughnut stands, Mexican food, pizza, Thai, Vietnamese, the list goes on! Every single one of them is made sickly sweet for the western palate laden with sugar or covered with deep-fried starch. One simply finds it almost impossible to escape from sugar or starch. The vendors know this of course. Lacing food with starch, sugar, salt, and fat is cheap and none of the vendors particularly care that Mr and Mrs Fatty, on the brink of a coronary, will gorge themselves silly at the fast-food court seemingly at ease that more than half their body is draping down like a curtain overflowing around the edges of their chairs which are, themselves, near to collapse.

At this point, there may be some out there who are thinking that my comment is little harsh. Well, I'm very sorry to say, but after two years of a pandemic which claimed far more lives of those who were obese, and yet, little or no effort was made by our government to pass the message that being fat isn't a good thing, I really have no sympathy except for the very few who have underlying health issues or some physical handicap. Sure, the older of us didn't fare so well, but saying that, I've never seen an obese ninety-year-old either. As I said, I may be particularly harsh in my views because, at a younger stage of my life, I was overweight myself which excluded or discouraged me from joining various social groups until I took the plunge and decided to do something about it. Which I did, except I went a bit extreme in my mid-twenties to early thirties. But since then, I've been more moderate, taking far more control of my diet, although there's a few excess pounds I'd like to lose.

The late comedian, Dave Allen, once said that he really hates smokers because he was a smoker himself and said that he was one of those real nasty hardcore *ex-smokers*. A similar phenomenon sometimes occurs with those who were bullied in their early life and become successful in later years. They often become the bullies themselves, usually based on some perverted form of vindication. As if it was 'payback time'. Allegedly, Elon Musk was bullied at school which, perhaps, to some extent, might account for some of his flamboyant behaviour streaked with ingenuity, irony, and a touch of malice. Such qualities wouldn't look out of place in Cambridge and Oxford circles, although that might have changed in more recent years, a period in which various forms of wokeness and 'safe spaces' have invaded our institutions of learning.

Back to the food courts and fast food.

First, of course, are the big chain fast food joints like McDonalds, KFC, and Subway, all being hugely popular and massively overpriced if quality of the food is the metric by which to judge. Oddly, I recoil at the smell coming out of a Subway establishment. That strange and pervasive odour from the kind of bread they bake there which seems to linger up to one hundred metres away. As for Subway's ingredients, if you don't eat bread, then what's essentially remaining are tubs of bits of salads, cold cuts, and flavourless cheese, the whole of which, don't really add up to being much in the way of good value.

Then there are the myriad of bakeries and sandwich shops, most of which sell vast piles of chips to accompany the already hugely starch-ridden meals. The

funny thing with these sandwich shops is this. It's the type of place that seems to attract nearby creature-of-habit office workers with no sense of culinary adventure willing to cough up a tidy sum of money for the same bits of cold cuts, salad, and cheese in a sandwich baguette *every* single day despite many dozens of other eating options *just a little* further down the road. One wonders if it would make more sense to buy the ingredients yourself and make it in the office. On my daily commute to work, after getting off on one of the stations, I can time my watch to the same office worker walking at a brisk pace with his recently-purchased coffee in his hand from the nearby café. It's an amusing observation, especially as he seems to walk with a strange gait and has no neck with his coffee poised at right-angles as if he's holding a ceremonial staff of sorts.

This leaves the international options, and thank goodness we do have a rich variety of cultural foods to choose from. But they're not as they're meant to be. One would think they could find some healthy non-starchy food from the Indian outlets. But no. Out of all the nearby food court Indian outlets, none of them sell simple tasty tandoori chicken or lamb, a delectable choice for those wishing to feast on a low-carb diet. Instead, every item is a gunky sugar-laden curry with little in the way of meat accompanied by chips and rice. Being in Australia, everything seems to come with chips, or French Fries, for the Americans of us. Chinese food court material is even worse, the majority of which is deep fried encrusted with batter made from oil which should have been changed last week. As for the non-fried dishes, it is, again, steeped with so much sugar and made to be as slimy as possible as to make it practically inedible. One seldom sees a Chinese person eating Chinese food from a food court outlet.

Out of a corner of my eye is what looks like to be something called a BBQ Shack or some name of that descript. Surely, I could find something meaty, savoury, and most importantly, not starchy. I was wrong to discover that *every* dish on the menu comes with an armoury of asides including chips, bread rolls, corn on the cob, thick gravy, and a sugary sauce over the meat. I asked if I could just have the meat and how much it would cost. The answer was that the meal comes with what's on the menu, and should you request not to have the starchy asides, you still have to pay the same. A basic rip-off and a complete con in my opinion.

The better dishes start with the Vietnamese, Malaysian, and Thai outlets in my opinion in which you can get savoury soup dishes and sumptuous meat dishes, although one still has to be careful with the sugar content, particularly with those very tasty laksa noodle soups. But the winner of healthy non-starchy, non-sugary

food goes to the yiros or shawarma plate of lamb or chicken. It is the *only* dish in a fast food court which both tastes amazing and satisfies the appetite, yet having virtually no carbs if one chooses the plate rather than the wrap. It is composed of spiced lamb or chicken which is sliced into pieces along with a salad of tabouli, onions, lettuce, chilis and your choice of sauces, most of them being, in general, savoury and free of sugar. I have come across the odd rip-off now and again with those plate of yiros served with a bed of chips underneath, which is sacrilege as far as I'm concerned. Naturally, I never come back to such establishments.

I have seen, on rare occasions, food court outlets specialising in Mongolian BBQ, Chinese roast pork and duck, and Indian tandooris, but they are, in general, more difficult to find. The profits, I expect, are less as well, due to the higher cost of the food and knowing that many westerners like their sweet and sour pork or chicken masala curries. After all, why not make a big profit on selling cheaply made sauces with a few bits of meat in it?

Therefore, I find myself choosing the food court which has a yiros outlet which I can base some level of trust knowing that I'm not only going to eat healthy, but have a real tasty meaty feast with a nice salad on the side. Not only that. It's going to fill me up without resorting to the horrid starchy crap food courts are so infamous for.