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The Great Fast-Food Pig-Out of 2011 Is Almost Upon Us

By Melanie Warner | January 4, 2011

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Many fast food restaurants are planning a pig-out for 2011, introducing indulgent, high-calorie menu items, like a six-cheese, double bacon pizza from **Papa John's** (PZZA) and an "ultimate breakfast platter" from **Burger King**, which has 1,300 calories and could feed an entire family.

At a time when many people say they want to lose weight, these new additions to the extreme dining trend call our collective bluff and reveal that Americans don't actually want to eat healthier, at least when it comes to restaurants. It's a gaping dietary double standard — we care about healthy choices at the grocery store, but throw caution to the wind when eating out, somehow acquiescing to the idea that pizza benefits from a double helping of bacon.

According to an *LA Times* article, here are a few other gut busting items that will be hitting the menu boards soon:

Taco Bell's (YUM) double ham and cheddar melt and a sausage skillet burrito. And breakfast items that involve cinnamon rolls, thanks to the company's partnership with **Cinnabon**
Dunkin' Donuts' Pancake Bites — bite-sized sausage links wrapped in a maple-flavored pancake

If you accept the premise of former **FDA** commissioner **David Kessler's** book, *The End of Overeating*, this last one will be thoroughly addictive since it contains a trifecta of sugar, salt and fat — a combination our brains are hard-wired to crave.

None of this bodes well for the fight against obesity in 2011.

Packaged food manufacturers would never get away with this sort of gluttony. They're busy going in the other direction, trying to make themselves look good by reducing quantities of salt, sugar and fat in

many of their products. We know this because the **Grocery Manufacturers Association** never misses an opportunity to tout the purported health-promoting activities of its members.

The chain restaurant industry labors under no such obligation, largely because many of their customers don't expect them to. **Darren Tristano**, exec vp at the food industry consulting firm **Technomic**, believes that consumers are more likely to be calorie-conscious at the grocery store, when they can peruse product labels:

The vast majority of consumers are looking for better-tasting and higher-calorie. We don't think that's what we want, but that's what we buy and consume.

For all the metabolic horror of a triple burger and **IHOP's** all-you-can-eat pancakes, **Gary Stibel** of the **New England Consulting Group** says restaurants are just giving people what they want. "People go there to eat and have a good time, not to restrict themselves and save calories," he said.

Of course, restaurants also try to play to their more calorie-conscious customers, hence things like Taco Bell's Drive-Thru Diet and **Applebee's** (DIN) under 550 calorie menu. But those efforts are drowned out by meals aimed at exploiting our desire to consume as many calories as possible for \$2.99.

Some of this is likely to change when mandatory menu labeling, which requires chains to post calories and other info on menu boards, goes into effect later this year. The requirement, part of the new healthcare law, effectively brings restaurant food into the light of day, robbing diners of the experience of wolfing down 1,300 calories in blissful ignorance.

Image from Papa John's

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