Grilled Chicken Dinner: Take Out or Homemade

For our series comparing homemade to quick serve restaurant food I decided to compare a grilled chicken meal from Wendy’s with my own version at home. When I’m deciding on food I take time, money and nutrition into consideration. Check out the sections below to see my comparison.

NUTRITION

My grilled chicken meal has 200 fewer calories, less fat and less sodium than the Wendy’s meals. I added milk to my meal which we would drink at home, but probably wouldn’t get at the drive through.

Both of the Wendy’s sandwiches and meals have similar calories but the source of the calories is different. The Crispy (code word for fried) sandwich has about half the protein (less meat) but 100 more calories from fat than the grilled sandwich. The larger portion of chicken and bigger bun in the Grilled Chicken meal is reflected in the price. The Crispy Chicken Sandwich costs $1.49 while the Ultimate Chicken Grilled Costs $4.59.

COST

My homemade meal included:

- Grilled Chicken on a whole grain bun with lettuce and onion
- A romaine lettuce salad with added green pepper, radishes and Italian dressing
- non-fat milk
- a chocolate ice cream bar

It costs $2.56 per person or $10.24 for 4 people. I used frozen chicken breasts because they cost $6.99 for a 3 pound bag and the butcher case breasts were $3.69 per pound. I could have saved a dollar by buying ‘wheat’ buns instead of whole wheat but I wasn’t willing to sacrifice the nutrition. By cleaning and cutting the romaine I got two meals of lettuce for the same price as the 12 ounce bag of pre-washed and chopped lettuce.

The grilled chicken meal with a side salad and junior frosty would cost $6.59 each or $25.96 for 4.

The crispy chicken sandwich with a side salad and junior frosty would be $3.50 for 1 for $14 for 4.

Continued on page 2
TIME

The time to drive to Wendy’s from my house during 5:30 traffic, wait in the drive up and drive home is 31 minutes.

I figure it took about 35 minutes at home. The day before our meal, I put the frozen chicken breasts a in a plastic bag to thaw in the refrigerator. (2 minutes)

When I got home I started the grill to heat, then pounded the chicken breasts so they were about the same thickness and added bottled Italian dressing for a marinade. While the grill finished heating I set the table and prepared the salad. (10 minutes)

Cleaning up was simple, five minutes and I was done!

Peggy Martin—Registered Dietitian

Easy, Quick Pad Thai

In August I eat salads, grill, or do quick stove-top meals. Quick Pad Thai is one of those stove-top all-in-one meals I usually serve in a bowl. We modeled it after the street food in Thailand but with ingredients you can easily find in the Midwest. Ours uses whole wheat spaghetti but you could use the more traditional rice noodles. When I make this in the summer I use whatever vegetables are ready in the garden and in the winter I use frozen vegetables. Bright colored veggies such as red pepper, broccoli, and snap peas look great.

I use either chunky or smooth peanut butter, whatever I have open and I make light soy sauce by mixing equal parts water and regular soy sauce.

One caution, after you cut up the chicken make sure you wash the cutting board knife and your hands with hot water and soap so you don't transfer bacteria to the other ingredients.

Quick Pad Thai

Serving Size: 1 1/4 cups  Serves: 6  Cost Per Serving: $1.06

Ingredients

- 6 ounces whole wheat thin spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 24 ounces frozen vegetable mix or chopped fresh veggies

Continued on page 3
3 tablespoons light soy sauce
1/4 cup water
1/4 cup peanut butter
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 pound boneless chicken breast, cut into bite-sized pieces
3 eggs
1/3 cup chopped peanuts

Instructions:

1. Cook spaghetti according to package directions. Drain in colander and toss with 1 tablespoon oil.
2. Defrost vegetables in microwave for 5 minutes and drain well (as spaghetti cooks).
3. Combine soy sauce, water, peanut butter, and sugar in a small bowl. Stir until smooth and set aside.
4. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in large skillet over medium high heat. Add chicken pieces and cook and stir until no longer pink (heat chicken to at least 165°F).
5. Crack eggs into a small bowl and beat. Add to pan with chicken and scramble until firm. Add the vegetables and spaghetti to the pan with the chicken mixture. Stir to heat through.
6. Add the soy sauce mixture to the pan and stir to coat veggies and spaghetti.
7. Place in serving bowl and sprinkle peanuts on top.

Peggy Martin—Registered Dietitian

What I Have Learned Being Part of the Spend Smart, Eat Smart, Team

I joined the Spend Smart Eat Smart Team as a junior here at Iowa State University, a little over a year after I no longer had an on-campus meal plan so I was buying my own groceries and preparing my own meals. I liked to cook but struggled when it came to knowing how to budget my spending on groceries as well as how to reduce food waste in my kitchen.

I am so lucky to have had the opportunity to work, grow and learn both professionally and personally through this job experience. Because this is my final blog post as a part of the Spend Smart Eat Smart Team I thought it would be appropriate to share with you a few lessons I’ve learned through working on this team as well as my favorite Spend Smart recipes.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned through working with the Spend Smart Eat Smart team is how to use my freezer in a way that saves me time, money, and stress.
1. Buy frequently used items in bulk when they are on sale to save money.

Examples of Frequently Used Frozen Items in My Kitchen:

Chicken
Tilapia
**Hamburger** (cooked or uncooked)
Peas
Berries
Other Fruits and Vegetables
Rather than buying frequently used frozen items at full price when I need them or occasionally getting lucky with a sale, I watch for the sale and then purchase multiple packages. This saves me money in both the price of the actual item as well as a trip to the grocery store because I already have it on hand. See the table below for recommended freezer storage time.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bacon and Sausage</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casseroles</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg whites or egg substitutes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Dinners and Entrees</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravy, meat or poultry</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ham, Hotdogs and Lunchmeats</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, uncooked roasts</td>
<td>4 to 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, uncooked steaks or chops</td>
<td>4 to 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, uncooked ground</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, cooked</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry, uncooked whole</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poultry, uncooked parts</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry, uncooked giblets</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry, cooked</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soups and Stews</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild game, uncooked</td>
<td>8 to 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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2. Freeze leftovers or make a meal specifically for freezing with a future hectic day in mind.

As a college student I had a few hectic days (the group project meeting that was suppose to take an hour and ended up taking 3….) that left me staring into my refrigerator at 8 pm – starving, grumpy, tired and wondering what to eat. While it is hard to control things not going as planned, it is not hard to plan dinner for those days! I learned to simply freeze a portion or two of leftovers or I would anticipate a stressful week and prepare and freeze an entire meal. Nothing was better than coming home exhausted from a long day and knowing I was a few minutes away from having a delicious home cooked meal.

Soups (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/soup), Enchiladas (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/cheesy-chicken-enchilada-bake), and Ham and Brown Rice (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/ham-brown-rice) are my go-to freezer meals.

Finally, I thought I would highlight my top 7 all-time favorite Spend Smart recipes (my top 10 would spill the beans about upcoming recipes so stay tuned!!). If you are looking for a budget friendly, delicious, quick meal definitely check these out.

1. Quick Pad Thai (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/quick-pad-thai)
2. Pan Fried Tilapia with Orange Sauce (http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/2014/03/03/pan-fried-tilapia-with-orange-sauce/)
3. Whole Grain Cereal Treat (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/whole-grain-cereal-treats)
4. No Knead Whole Wheat Bread (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/no-knead-whole-wheat-bread)
5. MmmmmGood Fruit Pizza (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/mmmmmgood-fruit-pizza)
6. Ham and Brown Rice (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/ham-brown-rice)
7. Chocolate Surprise Cupcakes (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/recipes/chocolate-surprise-cupcakes)

I’m excited to take the lessons I have learned and recipes with me to Peoria, IL as I begin my dietetic internship. I look forward to keeping in touch with Spend Smart Eat Smart via the Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/spendsmarteatsmart).

--Liz—2014 ISU Dietetics Graduate