



## taste buds

chef Larry Janes

## Fat isn't all bad for body

To many people fat has become a nasty word. To this day, I can remember growing up and being told the magical phrase, "You're not fat, just big boned." I guess I'm really showing my age when I can recall visiting the "chubby boys" shop at Sears.

To minimize the effect of fat in my life, I can attest to being a card-carrying lifetime member of Weight Watchers, Vic Tanny and a few retrospective "fat clubs."

So why all the hoopla that is bombarding us in just about every issue of magazines and newspapers from Consumers Reports all the way to the swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated, concerning fat in our everyday diets?

Believe it or not, fat is a vital nutrient. Like carbohydrates and protein, dietary fat is an important source of energy in our diets. Nutritionists tell us that dietary fat is especially important to children for proper growth. Fat maintains healthy skin, regulates cholesterol and helps regulate some hormone substances that regulate body processes. Fat is needed to carry vitamins throughout the body, and without it their absorption into our systems is hindered. Without fat, our bodies would have less energy, and I would be remiss if I forgot to mention its importance in insulating the body and supporting and cushioning organs.

BUT RATHER THAN go into a long, boring description of what fat is, let me tell you that there is "good" fat and, unfortunately, "bad" fat.

Mention "bad" fat and one usually conjures up thoughts of inch-thick steaks complete with well-marbled lines of the white substance. But there are additional sources of animal fat that we get daily from our consumption of poultry, fish, milk, milk products and eggs. Then there's vegetable fat, which derives from plant oils such as soybean, corn, sunflower, safflower, canola, cottonseed palm and coconut.

Fat is an important ingredient in many foods because of its functional properties. In many recipes, fat enhances the taste, aroma and texture of the foods we eat and enjoy. Because it is digested more slowly than proteins or carbohydrates, fat also plays an important role in providing a sense of fullness after eating.

But what would a fillet mignon be without fat? Probably a casualty between a beef jerky and a bone-dry martini. Without fat, muffins would crumble into oblivion right in their paper-lined cups. Your pancakes could double as Frisbees while your breakfast cereal would probably taste like some bark from a tree in Euell Gibbons' backyard. Your birthday cake would taste like something my sister made in her first year home ec class in high school that even the birds refused to consume.

An excess of fat in our diets has become increasingly recognized as one of the major factors influencing the development of chronic disease. We risk high blood pressure, high cholesterol and hardening of the arteries, not to mention a stroke or heart attack when our bodies take in more of the wrong fat than we should.

SO WHAT'S A FOODIE to do? Are we destined to eat crud for the remainder of our healthy lives? Fortunately, major food manufacturers are responding to our needs by introducing new "lighter"-in-fat products, everything from mayonnaise to ice cream.

On the home front, we can be informed consumers and can begin reading labels and choosing products low in saturated fat (i.e. animal fats, cottonseed, palm and coconut oils). Instead of eliminating fats from our daily regimens, we can substitute healthier fat products that use unsaturated fats such as canola (the healthiest fat on earth).

Recipes on 2B



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Phyllis Marra's family recipe for Bread Pudding combines butter, sugar, eggs, milk, vanilla extract, cinnamon, raisins and Italian bread.

## Passionate about pudding

By Katie Maple McBride  
special writer



Marra turns the simple pudding into an elegant dessert, serving it in goblets.

THE DESSERT TABLE touts a picture-perfect limer torte, chocolate mousse cake, strawberry cheesecake and a lemon chiffon pie, each minus one or two slices. An empty bowl sits among this fancy foursome, boasting a few stray raisins and some remaining flecks of custard.

It was bread pudding and, alas, it's all gone. According to Phyllis Marra, a passionate pudding fan, such scenarios are common. She said she has learned to head straight for the stuff as soon as it hits the buffet at the Bloomfield Hills Country Club.

"There can be mounds of fresh raspberries and every wonderful dessert you can imagine, but when you get to the bread pudding, you always see the bottom of the bowl," Marra said.

Hon Wakefield, pastry chef at the club for the past 27 years, said the pudding "is one of the first things that goes on the buffets, and if we don't have it, they (the members) want to know why."

COOKBOOKS DIFFER in the origin of bread pudding, but most attribute the tasty dessert to the thrifty Britains. One cookbook author suggests the pudding was created to make use of a never-ending supply of buttered bread from Victorian tea tables.

The dish has been popular for years in the United States, especially in New England and Cajun and Southern regions. In the age-old South, bread pudding was called "slimlet pudding," using ingredients such as "a peany loaf and marrow." Over the years, chefs cooked up a variety of fancy variations for the dessert, caramelizing the pan and beating the egg white separately.

In her book, "Dumnyankee in a Southern Kitchen," author Helen Worth questions the cost-consciousness of cooks who bought expensive ingredients for bread pudding. "Making it involved the dubious economies of investing additional cash to avoid wasting stale bread," Worth quips.

Avoiding waste and saving money was a way of life in the 1930s, when simple versions of bread pudding arrived on many a table.

Wakefield said one of his country club customers commented that the dessert was all his family ate during the Depression, suggesting the devotion to bread pudding may be rooted in nostalgia.

"IT'S ALWAYS BEEN popular, ever since I came here 27 years ago," Wakefield explained. "Maybe it's something that people were brought up on."

Marra, a Bloomfield Hills resident, said her mother used to make bread pudding for her when she was a little girl, topping each serving with homemade applesauce. Marra makes her own pudding today, but the smell of vanilla and cinnamon wafting from a warm bowl brings back fond memories of those special times in her childhood.

In addition to the memories, Marra said she likes the dessert because it's "not real, real sweet. When I eat it, it feels like it's good for me."

While admitting she doesn't know the actual nutritional benefits of bread pudding, she said the low-sugar, high-carbohydrate dish is a healthy choice for everyone.

"Mothers love to serve it as a dessert for children," she said. "It's a nice substitute for birthday cake. Bread and eggs have a good nutritional value."

Please turn to Page 2

## Sky-high desserts a whistle stop away

See recipes 2B  
By Geri Rinachlor  
special writer

Have you been yearning for a slice of fresh apple crumb pie the way Grandma used to make it? Or savoring a piece of moist carrot cake that's high enough to touch the sky? Well, now, I know it's the '90s, and rich, creamy, sugar-laden desserts are a no-no, but eating healthy every day doesn't mean that every now and then we can't delve into a little bit of dessert.

Tucked away near the old Birmingham train station, the Whistle Stop coffee shop has been serving regional specialties such as Swiss steak and chicken and dumplings for about 25 years. Featured on its traditional luncheon and dinner menu is a long list of made-from-scratch fruit and cream pies and delectable cakes and tortes.

On any given day you can expect to see a few cream chocolate cake and coconut cream, banana cream, apple sour cream, cherry and blueberry fruit pies. All of them are created daily by Kim Christy. She has loved to bake ever since she was a little girl. "Cooking comes naturally to me," she says, claiming it's because she is part Greek.

MANY OF THE recipes Christy

uses were handed down to her from her grandmother and great-grandmother. But she gives much of the credit for her success to her dad, shop owner Harold Christy. "When I first started baking here three years ago, he was a tough teacher," she said. He insisted that everything be done exactly to his specifications, no improvising.

"Now, I create new recipes all the time. Often I get ideas for a new dessert recipe when I'm grocery shopping with my kids," she said. Although Christy is mother of two young children — Kyle, 3 years old, and Lindsey, 18 months — she still finds time to invent new desserts. Her latest is a raspberry mousse layer cake lavishly covered with raspberry frosting. Christy's favorites are Very Berry Fruit Pie and double chocolate cream pie.

If you've never sampled a Whistle Stop dessert, you're in for a treat. And don't be surprised if you run into a few familiar faces while you're there. Detroit Lions stars Eric Williams and Jim Arnold and Detroit Pistons' world champions Isiah Thomas and Bill Laimbeer are on the Whistle Stop who's who list.

Besides fruit pies and cakes, the Whistle Stop will custom bake birthday, anniversary and wedding cakes. Christy and the shop's professional

cake decorator air brush any number of designs and characters. They also can duplicate a cake design from a photograph, along with the traditional cake decorations.

In their small, 10-by-20-foot bake shop they have created hundreds of wedding cakes that serve as few as 20 people or as many as 500. There's

a large variety of cake batters to choose from including white, chocolate, carrot, peach, pineapple, banana nut and more. Generally, they need two-three days advance notice for birthday cake orders and need to know as soon as possible for wedding cake orders. Their wedding cakes are traditional, and they often work

with a local florist to coordinate the flowers, which adorn the top of the tiered cakes.

TO SEND a birthday cake to an out-of-town friend or relative, you only need to give them the address and they will do the rest.



Kim Christy learned to bake the Whistle Stop's delicious desserts under the direction of her father, Harold Christy.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer