

EAT THIS



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FROM LEFT: Delivered to your door in a critter-proof cooler.
Tuna salad and poached salmon—some assembly required

GOURMET A GO-GO *Can the latest diet-delivery service be any better than the others?* BY JESSICA STRAND

Los Angeles is bloated with diet-delivery services promising “a slimmer you” in just weeks. And usually you can’t help but lose weight—because the food is downright inedible. So when I was asked to taste-test a weeks worth of meals from Fresh, a new service that employs chefs who’ve worked in some of the city’s better restaurants (like Bastide and JiRaffe), I wondered: Is it possible that dietary cuisine could actually be delicious?

MONDAY

A cushioned cooler magically arrived outside my door during the night. (The folks at Fresh had asked for specific delivery instructions to make sure the cooler would be safe from any pesky varmints.) I unzipped it to find three square meals, starting with peaches in fresh mint and wine, plus some cottage cheese, for breakfast—which was surprisingly delicious and elegantly presented. Lunch was a very tasty salad of dried calimyrna fig, goat cheese and spinach. This can’t be diet food. Then for dinner, chicken tandoori wrapped in chard—again, absolutely delicious. A chewy chocolate rum ball rolled in coconut sated my sweet tooth. OK, they’ve got my attention.

TUESDAY

“What interesting dishes await me?” I wondered as I retrieved the cooler. Blueberry pancakes to start. And they actually taste like something from a restaurant, with a nice whole-grain crumb and nutty flavor. For lunch, white bean and chorizo salad—two ingredients generally off limits to dieters, but I gleefully delved into my light Latin-inspired lunch. Later, as I began dinner, I wondered, “How does their fish stay so tender?” I reheated it for, a minute or two, and it turned out perfectly: Indian-spiced halibut with spinach, snap peas and carrots. Then came the first disappointment: The Prosecco-poached pear for dessert was hard and mealy. I hoped this wasn’t an omen.

WEDNESDAY

I wasn’t suffering yet. In fact I looked forward to my daily deliveries. Breakfast was a smoked-salmon omelet with cream cheese. But eggs are never quite as good when they’re reheated. Grilled flank steak salad for lunch needed more

dressing, but the meat was rosy and tender. Dinner was black tiger shrimp with Thai coconut broth and coconut macaroons for dessert. Hey, since when is coconut milk allowed? Or macaroons, for that matter? Forget about pacing. This was so good, I never looked up from my plate.

THURSDAY

“More macaroons perhaps?” My fingers were crossed. There was cinnamon French toast for breakfast. OK, I’ve decided that dieting can be fun. The salad of mixed greens with currants, apples and Parmesan seemed too light for lunch, so I combined it with my snack of chilled cucumber soup topped with rock shrimp ceviche for a more satisfying meal. Dinner of miso-glazed cod (sort of like the stuff I they serve at Matsuhisa) with drunken mirin cucumber was so soft and tender that I couldn’t help but think of that diet no-no: BUTTER. Officially spoiled, I popped a creamy peppermint truffle into my mouth for dessert.

FRIDAY

Instead of dreaming of Bernaise sauces and dark chocolate cake, I was sad that this was my last delivery. A Gruyère and spinach omelet with slow-roasted tomatoes for breakfast. I have to say eggs were my least favorite. Lunch, arugula salad with peaches, prosciutto, mozzarella and ice-wine dressing—it was so elegant, I felt like I’d flown to Capri for the day. Dinner: Less inspired, but full of flavor—sirloin steak with mushroom cream.

THE VERDICT

Overall, better than good. In fact, verging on great. ‘What can I say? Dietary cuisine *can* be delicious—that is, if coconut macaroons and mushroom cream sauce do in fact qualify as diet food. I didn’t try the service long enough to determine whether anyone could actually lose weight this way. And, of course, good food doesn’t come cheap. The program Costs about \$43 a day, but when you think about it, that’s not so bad for three squares and a snack. I never had an irritable deprived dieting moment or a need to raid the fudge... I was completely sated. Call 800.513.6405, or visit www.freshdining.com.