

DIET AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Gourmet meals may make weight-loss easier

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Diet on the go

Portioned, delivered gourmet meals a fresh idea that's catching on quickly with the calorie-conscious

By Sandra Barrera
Staff Writer

Heather East enjoys rich, delicious food as much as the next person. Maybe more.

When she tipped the scale at more than 300 pounds last year, the 39-year-old wife and working mother of two knew she had to make a drastic lifestyle change.

And she wasn't thinking crash diet. "There's so many gimmicks out there," East says. "The energy drinks and the lose-weight pills are all bull. They may work if all you have to lose is a couple of pounds, but it's not going to work for somebody who has to lose a significant amount of weight.

"It's got to be over a period of time," she says. "It has to be done safely."

So, in December, the Van Nuys woman passed on gastric bypass surgery and signed up for the gourmet diet-to-go service Fresh Dining.

She's nearly 40 pounds lighter as a result.

Celebrity clientele

Fresh Dining is a Burbank-based company that has helped Janet Jackson and former talk-show host Ricki Lake slim down considerably.

One in a growing number of comparable services and with financial backing from Lee Iacocca, it delivers fresh, portion-controlled meals to the doorsteps of dieters across Southern California.



Hans Gutierrez/Staff Photographer

Meals from the Fresh Dining facility in Burbank are delivered pre-portioned to diners' doorsteps.

"People don't eat right ... and it's got to stop or we're going to grieve a lot of people that are going to die too early in their lives," Iacocca says while raising concerns about diabetes in a video on the company's Web site. "And that's why (the Fresh Dining) concept is so terrific ... that there's good food out there, and it can taste good and look good and be good for you."

The Bay Area and San Diego are next on the radar for Fresh Dining as the company goes up against other established gourmet diet-to-go businesses.

Fresh Dining starts at \$45.95 a day for a standard meal and \$55.95 for organic.

"It's expensive, but it's well worth it," says East, who each morning opens her front door to find a cooler filled with a day's worth of nutritious, chef-prepared meals totaling no more than 1,200 to 1,400 calories.

Men receive 1,800 to 2,000 calories a day.

Among last week's meals was French toast topped with apple-cinnamon compote and vanilla-ricotta cream, Ponzuski edamame and fava bean dip with sesame chips, seared ahi tuna over mixed greens tossed with a honey, soy and lavender vinaigrette and pan-seared beef medallions with roasted fingerling potatoes and spinach. And for dessert, a decadent chocolate tart topped with fresh raspberries.

"With us, you are going to be eating differently," says Bruce N. Knight, chief operating officer of Fresh Dining. "But you're eating frequently enough that your body gets used to a certain amount of intake. If you wanted to get off the diet, you have a greater repertoire of things to go after. You have changed your eating habits. You have changed the menu, as it were, and we think that's significant."



Nutritional counseling

But East owes her success so far to more than just tasty meals with a gourmet flair.

Fresh Dining also offers its clients nutritional counseling and even puts them in touch with a fitness trainer, the latter of which can rack on an additional \$75 to \$200 an hour.

East works out once a week with Tim "Timmy T" Talman, the 42-year-old son of the late character actor William Talman of "Perry Mason" fame, who owns and operates Valley Boot Camp out of Encino.

He has been working with East on cardio training and lean-muscle building since she started with the program.

"This is a woman who has been in a cocoon of her own weight issues," Talman says. "Now that we're starting to peel away the layers, she's finding out exactly who she is."

East, who's working through emotional issues from her childhood, says food was always a safe haven.

"In my life now, I'm trying to change the way that I look at things because when you're 39 and you're still looking at your food as comfort, that's not right," she says. "It's meant to nourish your body, not comfort you."

INSIDE

The challenges

TV

Taste-testing the recipe for success

Say the word "diet" and it brings to mind heaping platters of raw carrot sticks and low-fat cottage cheese. For people with any serious weight to lose, eating this way is a guaranteed recipe for failure. Losing weight the right way includes eating a variety of portion-controlled, nutritiously balanced meals, like the kind gourmet diet-to-go companies deliver to clients' doorsteps. We put three popular services to the taste test:

DINNER SHOWDOWN:



What: Fresh Dining Grilled Chicken Fontina with Citrus Baby Veggies and Broccolini with Toasted Garlic Chips
Taste: Tender, fresh and flavorful.



What: ZoneChef
Usage: with C
Ingredients: Couscous
Taste: Spicy and
 artaste.

NOTES:

What: ZoneC



Van Nuys resident Heather East, above, eats a pre-made Fresh Dining salad. East has lost nearly 40 pounds since December. At left, executive chef Mike Weldon prepares Caribbean Salads at the Fresh Dining facility.

OUR TASTERS' FAVORITES:



What: Fresh Dining Dark Chocolate Mousse
Taste: Light and fluffy with an explosive chocolate flavor.

What: seasonal
 vitamin C-rich
 touch to the

SO-FAVOR

What: ZoneChef
Taste: Sour.



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—Heather East

"The energy drinks and the lose-weight

