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Beat the Summer Heat



Fruit smoothies can be a tasty (and healthy) way to stay cool

BY DAVID KING

Chicagoans are no strangers to trying just about anything to beat the summer heat. One of the tastiest, healthiest ways to do so is to drink a fruit smoothie.

Fresh fruits have a number of health benefits. They contain vitamins and other nutrients that, among other things, can help detoxify the body, regulate blood sugar, facilitate digestion and keep cholesterol in check. They're also a good source of energy and hydration.

According to Kevin Gianni, author of *Smoothie Recipes for Optimum Health*, smoothies are nutritious not only because they are made with fresh, whole food ingredients, but also because they make more nutrients available to the body.

"When you put your ingredients into a blender, the blade—particularly if you use a high-speed blender—will break down some of the fiber, releasing nutrients from the cells," he says. "In terms of the health benefits, when you give your body easily absorbed nutrients like minerals, vitamins and phytonutrients, your body works more efficiently."

The American Heart Association recommends having four to five servings of fruit per day. (The organization defines a serving as one medium-sized fruit, at about the size of a baseball, or one-half-cup of fruit juice.)

While smoothies abound in restaurants and cafés, what's tricky is to find those that are made from real fruit, be it fresh or frozen. Beware of smoothie mixes, which may contain added sugar, sodium, or artificial flavors.

The following is a sampling of places in the city that offer real-fruit smoothies. These five were chosen for selection, convenience and geographical diversity. All are independent businesses (though Fresh Choice has two locations), and most offer vegetable juice alongside the fruit.

If you want to go farther afield, consider trying your favorite health food store.

Bonne Sante Health Foods | 1512 E. 53rd St., Hyde Park Prices range from \$3.95 to \$6.95 | bonnesantehealthfoods.com

The juice bar in Hyde Park's one and only health food store has an extensive selection of drinks. Choose among strawberry, banana, blueberry, pineapple, and peach, and they'll mix it with apple juice, honey, and ice (even vanilla yogurt if you want). For a dollar more, you can order one of their "super shakes"—unique concoctions of fruit and supplements, with clever names like "Avena shakedown" or "Big hairdo." (Note that the juice bar closes an hour before the store does.)

Brian's Juice Bar and Deli | 80 E. Lake St., Loop Prices range from \$3.99 to \$4.50 | briansdeli.com

This takeout deli offers a good range of choices in a great location. Decide between ten fruits (a maximum of three for one drink) and a handful of supplements or frozen yogurt. An array of Middle Eastern dishes, sandwiches, soups, and salads makes this an appealing spot for lunch.

Fresh Choice | 233 N. Michigan Ave. (inside the office complex), Loop; 1534 N. Wells St., Old Town Prices range from \$4 to \$6.50 | freshchoicechicago.com

These twin stores have half a dozen tasty, cold smoothies. There's not much variation in ingredients; all six drinks have some combination of bananas, blueberries, and/or strawberries, with apple or a citrus fruit added. But taste makes this a minor point. (Fresh Choice also offers smoothies made from a mix, so be sure you're ordering a "totally fruit smoothie.") The downtown location is particularly convenient for those working in the 225/233 N. Michigan Ave. office complex and nearby buildings.

Pita Queen | 2852 N. Clark St. Prices range from \$2.99 to \$3.85 | pitaqueenchicago.com

While this unassuming cafeteria-style restaurant in East Lakeview offers Mediterranean food and salad bar options, what's not as readily apparent is its good choice of smoothies. Choose among eight fruits. Its low prices and proximity to the Bally gym three doors down make it a good place for a post-workout drink.

Soul Vegetarian East | 205 E. 75th St., Grand Crossing Prices range from \$4.25 to \$7 | soulvegetarianeast.com

Last but certainly not least, Soul Vegetarian has what must be one of the most charismatic rosters of drinks in the city. "Banana Moon," "Strawberry Heaven," and "Peanut Butter Surge" are just a few of the choices, which have equally cute descriptions to go with them (see their menu, available on the website). The restaurant says it uses fresh, not frozen, fruit—a rarity. This vegan eatery attracts patrons from far and wide, and even meat eaters will understand why.

David King is a Chicago-based freelance writer