

PAIRING FOOD AND FITNESS ON THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

by

Linda Mullally

For many of us weak-willed mere mortals, all bets were off as far as portion control and moderation around the holiday temptations. Then the ball dropped at midnight in Times Square and New Year's resolutions were thrown around like confetti.

Living in a community with gourmet to goodie food venues calling to us from every corner makes it difficult to stay "on the wagon". But dining out or indulging in your favorite treat shouldn't have to make you feel guilty or naughty.

Pumping, spinning and sweating with an instructor lashing you with motivation to a background of thumping tunes isn't for everyone. Nor is it everyone's goal to become a lean mean hiking machine. The good news is that the peninsula basks in an abundance of walking paths, bicycle trails and beaches for you to move at your pace and rhythm. Many of these happen to be a stride away from great food and treat venues. Think of food and fitness pairings as a fun way to earn it, eat it and burn it.

The recent expansion and enhanced exotic décor has more fans flocking to Dametra's, known for its festive flair. Earn your moussaka by parking the car on Rio Road and meander up the Mission Trail to downtown Carmel. Kick-start your metabolism rolling your hips to the rousing rhythm of the oud and drum jam in the aisle during dinner and burn off the spanakopita and baklava with the loop walk back to your car along Scenic Avenue's beach path.

A Lafayette Bakery scrumptious almond croissant or delicate fondant au chocolat doesn't have to blow your diet if you top it with a jaunt up Hatton Canyon along the path behind the Barnyard Shopping Center.

The new Wharf Marketplace in the refurbished Monterey train station is San Francisco Ferry Building Marketplace "light" and a great excuse for a mouth-watering panini followed by a scenic stroll or bike ride to Lover's Point along the Monterey Bay recreational path. Spin a little faster and you might deserve a scoop of Carousel Candies warm caramel corn on Fisherman's Wharf.

Tasty rewards abound between Palo Corona Regional Park at the mouth of the valley and Garland Ranch Regional Park at mid Valley. Lunch at Edgar's in Quail Lodge golf resort wouldn't be complete without a walk or a pedal west along the Big Sur Land Trust's Southbank River Trail off of Rancho San Carlos Road. If you feel ambitious and want to earn the juicy grass fed beef burger and a slice of flaky fruit of

day pie go to the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District website (MPRPD.com) and request the walk-in access code for Palo Corona Regional Park and parking pass for the trailhead on Rancho San Carlos Road. The Southbank River Trail leads to Palo Corona gate, where you can hoof and huff it to the panoramic ridge and feast on the Carmel Bay views.

At Mid Valley, Garland Ranch is laced with trails suitable for all fitness levels and ranks #1 for the best hiking in the sunshine. Greek food lovers who buck up and power walk that extra loop know they will be rewarded with Café Athena's gyros platter and family recipe babaghanoush just up the road in the Mid-Valley Shopping Center.

One of the best food and fitness pairings for a late afternoon hike is Garland Park's less known albeit parking-challenged Holt Road residential trailhead easement off of Robinson Canyon Road above Carmel Valley Ranch. Walk through the gated community's pedestrian access to the trailhead at the end of the street and follow the trail between the golf course and the houses to Horseshoe Trail up to a crest and down Huff and Puff trail into Carmel Valley Ranch Resort. Turn right into the guest room parking area at the wooden stairs on the right.

Follow the pedestrian walkway to the lodge restaurant and if it's after 5pm, whisper the magic words "locals menu" to your server for an exquisite selection of "Snack Options" from an artisanal cheese plate, Ranch pork dog or short rib burger to Chef Tim's award winning beef chili, Jose's Fish Market Quesadilla or pizza margherita. The TY Cobb Salad features fresh Ranch eggs and if your palate craves salt, you will want to ask about the organic garden's new sea salt house. If you plan on indulging in desserts, hit the trail with at least one another sweet-toothed hiker. You can split the bill and the guilt. There are plenty of calories to share in the crème brulee, warm chocolate chip cookies or house-made granola Farmers Market Fruit Crisp.

If imagining yourself in the French or Tuscan countryside inspires you to earn it before you eat it, park at the Carmel Valley Lodge before sunset for an early dinner reservation and take a promenade through the lavender-scented vineyard and around the hillside organic garden.

Whether you like it short and sweet or strenuous and salty, the Monterey Peninsula has a food and fitness pairing to suit every taste and pace.

Sidebar

Calorie Tip: Walking can help burn up to 300 calories per hour.

Land Stewardship Tip: Kleenex tissues, fluorescent orange peels and dog poop don't belong on the trails. Pack it in and pack it out to the trash.

www.dametracafe.com

www.athenacafecarmel.com

www.Lafayettebakery.com

www.wharfmarketplace.com

www.carmelvalleyranch.com (Tuesday Day Spa specials and other local perks and promotions)

www.quaillodge.com (Check out the new Pub Menu at Edgar's and the three-course "\$50 Dinner for Two" highlighting Quail's 50th Anniversary year.)

www.mprpd.org (Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District for Palo Corona Regional Park permit; check out the new visitor and education center in progress at Garland Ranch)

Linda B. Mullally and husband David share their passion for travel, outdoor recreation and dogs through articles, hiking books and photography.

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