



We Tried It: Relax, dinner's at the door

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Old-Fashioned Turkey Dinner with Herb Stuffing, Sweet Potatoes, Cranberry Sauce & Cabbage is on the Good \$ense menu. / Courtesy Photo

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I used to take all of Oprah's weight-loss success stories with a grain of salt. If I had a personal chef there to monitor every morsel I put into my mouth — better yet, prepare said morsels and make them taste delicious — I could eat better and more healthfully, too, I reasoned.

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Oprah may be onto something — and Susan Johnson can help.

Johnson is the founder and CEO of Susan's Healthy Gourmet, an Irvine-based meal delivery service committed to creating and delivering freshly made, quality meals straight

to your door, including to our corner of Riverside County.

The company recently launched Susan's Good \$ense Menu, which offers healthy selections from the regular menu in smaller portions. A nutritionist helps keep the day's meals to 1,250 calories per day.

Good \$ense refers to cost, too. Johnson said she developed this lower-cost alternative to her regular menu to meet the needs of people who find themselves cutting back due to the challenging economy.

The food:

We tried a few of the company's dishes, and were pleasantly surprised with what we saw and tasted. The food is made from very high-quality ingredients, and recipes have a gourmet slant.

The Inside Out Cheeseburger, for instance, features two kinds of cheese encasing a juicy, nicely seasoned beef patty, and served on a big, fluffy, multi-grain bun. A quick zap in the microwave was all it needed to satisfy one hungry noontime diner.

Another lunch choice, the Italian Chicken Sandwich, features a generous chicken filet that has been marinated before being grilled. For dinner, the Pan Seared Salmon is a restaurant-quality filet glazed with a tangy teriyaki sauce.

A Turkey Bacon and Cheddar Omelette is thick but surprisingly light and fluffy; the eggs lose nothing in the delivery process. It comes with fresh fruit for a no-fuss breakfast.

Susan's even makes dessert. Our Mini Pie of the Week turned out to be rhubarb — small chunks of it sweetened to create the perfect balance of sweet and sour poured into flaky little crust.

All meals come in compartmentalized plastic trays (sandwiches are wrapped in plastic first to preserve freshness) and in many cases, sauces and condiments are served on the side. Packages can be microwaved or frozen to eat later, although a sticker on the front of each offers the suggested "eat by" date. Menus change often, but standby items are rotated to ensure variety.

The cost:

A seven-day plan with two meals a day (lunch and dinner) is \$155.95, or about \$11 a meal. Three squares a day runs \$175.75, or about \$8 a meal.

Five day plans are also offered.

The verdict:

If you love to shop and cook, you can probably recreate the majority of the meals yourself, possibly at a lower cost.

But if you like the idea of being served, hate to cook, are unsure of how to create low-calorie meals or just want better portion control, it's a nice option.

Details:

www.susanshealthygourmet.com or (888) 396-3257