

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

FOOD

## Does Virtua Hospital have the best sushi in South Jersey?

An anonymous writer sang the praises of hospital cafeteria food on a Facebook group. Was it really that good? We tried it out for ourselves and brought along some brutally honest young critics.



Husband and wife sushi chefs Josef and Evie Sutiono interact with diners during lunchtime at the Virtua Voorhees Hospital cafeteria as they prepare made-to-order rolls.

Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

by Ellen Dunkel and Kristen A. Graham  
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“Please don’t judge me, but I like to eat lunch at Virtua Hospital in Voorhees. They have the best sushi . and it’s cheap. 🍣🍣🍣”

An anonymous writer posted that in the South Jersey Food Scene Facebook group.

It was followed by more than 700 responses, the vast majority positive.



A diner photographs the Living Color / Rainbow Room sushi roll created by husband and wife sushi chefs Josef and Evie Sutiono during lunchtime at the Virtua Voorhees Hospital cafeteria in January.

Tom Galish / Staff Photographer

“They had the best chicken fingers when I had my son!” one poster wrote. “I still talk about it almost 17 years later!”

**“I was there a year ago for surgery,” another wrote, “when I was on my way to an MRI the transport guy told me to try the cheesecake before I left. It was the best recommendation I got at Virtua!”**

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**“Their soups are TOP NOTCH too! You can buy it by the quart to take home!”**

**Was it really that good, we wondered? We needed to know for ourselves. We also needed some critics who would not hold back: Kristen’s son Kieran, a 10-year-old culinary connoisseur, and his 7-year-old brother, Julian, who has a less adventurous palate, but is bracingly honest.**





The sushi chefs who inspired this quest, Evie and Joe Sutiono, don't work weekends, so we missed them on our first visit. Our second time, they were on vacation. Our third visit was during what is usually their regular hours, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. There was no sight of them when we got there near opening time. But we spotted them setting up a few minutes later, and Virtua sushi would be ours!

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During three visits, we managed to try all of the highlights. Most of the food was far better than we expected from a cafeteria, especially one in a hospital. And most of it was a great bargain. ("One of the highlights is it's so cheap," said Kieran, who was not paying.)

For instance: a giant salad with fresh ingredients was \$2.38. On one trip, four of us ate main dishes, sides and dessert for \$35.64, with leftovers to take home.

Facebook was right: the chicken fingers are divine, not overly breaded or fried into submission. Julian was a major fan. “We’re coming here for my birthday,” he said. “This food is way better than my school cafeteria.”

The grill master carefully prepped an herbed chicken sandwich, cooking it apart from the burgers, placing it carefully in an open-faced container to keep the vegetables cool and crisp.

Desserts were another highlight, dotted with real whipped cream piped from a pastry bag, not thrown on with a spoon — Ellen enjoyed the double-chocolate cake, deemed “full of flavor, but not in-your-face sweet,” and Kieran rhapsodized about the German chocolate cake, especially its filling.

The pizza was quite good — not the best we’d ever had, but miles better than than the generic pizza you can find in many strip malls and Philly street corners.

“I wouldn’t call this warm, but it’s good,” Ellen said, digging into a thick corner piece of Sicilian pizza with sausage, onions, mushrooms, peppers, and bacon. That’s a pretty succinct distillation of the Virtua experience: elevated hospital cafeteria food, but still served in a hospital cafeteria, where the main objective is convenient nourishment, not necessarily presentation.

Still, Fred Cerne was more than pleased with his Virtua cafeteria experience. On a recent weekday, Cerne grabbed sushi rolls for himself and his wife, Regina, who had given birth to their son Dimitri hours before.

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The first thing Cerne heard about Virtua when he moved to West Deptford from Florida was that it was a good place to have a baby. The second thing, he said, was that “the food at the cafeteria is amazing — which is a really weird thing to hear about a hospital. They definitely didn’t lie. It is way better than I expected.”

And what about the sushi that inspired this quest? It was fresh and good, ranging from \$5.39 for a veggie roll to \$10.99 for the combinations. When we went, most of the offerings were in the \$8-\$10 range and were specialty rolls. Kieran thought his Philadelphia roll was good but standard. Ellen’s TNT roll was filling enough for an entire dinner for under \$10. But she prefers simpler sushi where the fish can shine.

The cafeteria is small but comfortable. There is plenty of seating and no one will give you the side eye if you come in off the street and head immediately over to eat.



Pizza during lunchtime at the Virtua Voorhees Hospital cafeteria.

Tom Galish / Staff Photographer

If you work in an office with an upgraded cafeteria, as Kristen's husband Garrick does, it may be similar to what you're used to. But for anyone spending a good deal of time at Virtua, or looking for a fresh salad that doesn't cost \$15, it's a great option.

## **If you go**

Virtua Voorhees Hospital, 100 Bowman Dr., Voorhees. Park in visitor lot A. Ask for a cafeteria pass at the security desk in the lobby. The cafeteria is to the left and down a short walkway.