

Mastering Food Choices

Dining Out the Healthy Way

The demand for convenience and a change in eating habits have contributed to the popularity of dining out. Busy schedules often force people to eat on the run. Take out, frozen foods, and home-delivered meals are habits characteristic of many Americans. Meals eaten away from home can potentially contribute excess calories, fat, and sodium while limiting the intake of calcium, dietary fiber, and vitamins A and C. Excess snacking from calorie-laden, low nutrient-dense foods can lead to consuming too much fat and sugar. The two trends of dining out more and an increased interest in health, fitness, and nutrition seem to be incompatible, but with careful planning, healthful eating can be achieved regardless of our busy lives.

Overall Nutrition Picture

Your overall nutrition picture depends on selections of food and serving sizes. To make wise food choices you need some

knowledge of food composition and preparation techniques. A balanced diet contains a wide variety of foods. Choose MyPlate (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/dietary-guidelines>) can assist you in food selections and amounts. When dining out, you don't have to eliminate all your favorite foods.

Simply choose foods high in calories, fat, sodium, and sugars less often and eat smaller portions. Don't forget to eat

three meals a day, as skipping meals makes it easier to overeat during another meal or snack. Thirty minutes of physical activity should also be an important part of your daily routine.

Reading Menus

Plan ahead. Choose restaurants that can accommodate your desired food selections. A greater selection of menu items gives you an opportunity to choose a variety.



Terms that usually denote low-fat preparation include:

- steamed in its own juice
- garden fresh
- broiled
- roasted
- poached
- tomato juice
- dry broiled in lemon juice or wine

Menu descriptors that should send warning signals of foods high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and possibly sodium include:

- buttered
- sautéed
- fried

- crispy
- braised
- cream sauce
- hollandaise
- au gratin
- escalloped
- marinated
- stewed
- baked
- casserole
- prime
- hash
- pot pie

If you are trying to cut down on portion sizes, try the following activities:

- Choose appetizers as the main course.
- Order a la carte.
- Share food
- Order dressings and sauces on the side.

If your food arrives and has not been prepared as you requested, send it back. If you are dining at a buffet, walk the buffet before you make your choices.

You can change the way you eat when dining out. With a little practice, you will soon be making wise food selections from any menu. And you'll find, with the exception of favorite foods, that you don't miss those calorie-laden, high fat or high sodium foods.

Table 1 gives some examples of how minor changes in your menu selections can add up to major savings in fat and calories.

Appetizers. Steamed seafood, raw vegetables, or fresh fruits are a delightful way to start any meal. Avoid salted nuts, buttery crackers, and potato or tortilla chips. If you cannot resist, put one serving on your plate, and eat slowly. Choose soups carefully, as they may be laden with sodium or fat. Clear soup bouillon or tomato-based soups are a healthier choice than cream-based soups.

Table 1. Saving fat and calories with healthy menu choices		
Fast food menu selections		
57 grams fat and 1190 calories Bacon double cheeseburger Large fries Milkshake	Vs	27 grams fat and 676 calories Regular cheeseburger Small fries Side salad with reduced fat dressing Low fat milk
38 grams fat and 734 calories Fried chicken breast Mashed potatoes and gravy Cole slaw with mayonnaise base Biscuit	Vs	5 grams fat and 313 calories Baked chicken Corn on the cobb Cole slaw with vinegar base Dinner roll
Submarine sandwich selections		
32 grams fat and 857 calories Salami, cheese, mayonnaise, tomato Pickles Submarine bun	Vs	10 grams fat and 356 calories Lean ham, mustard, lettuce, tomato Hot peppers pita pocket
Salad bar selections		
87 grams fat and 905 calories Lettuce, tomato, cheese, egg Macaroni salad, cole slaw, chicken salad Sunflower seeds, croutons Ranch dressing	Vs	6 grams fat and 390 calories Lettuce/spinach, tomato Carrots, broccoli, mushrooms Garbanzo beans, green pepper, fresh fruit salad, dinner roll Reduced fat dressing

Entrees. When ordering your main course, look for simply prepared foods, such as skinless poultry, fish and shellfish, and vegetable dishes. These foods are naturally low in fat and can be prepared without adding any fat. Lean red meats such as London broil, filet mignon, and round or flank steaks, when properly trimmed and prepared, are a good choice. Check with your server to see if broiled items are basted with fat; if so, ask if they can use a dry broil or if the dish can be broiled with lemon juice.

Salads. Salads that contain fresh greens such as lettuce and spinach and vegetables such as cucumbers, radishes, tomatoes, carrots, and onions offer great variety in flavor and texture without adding unwanted fat and salt. Be selective when eating from a salad bar; go easy on cheese, eggs, meat, bacon, croutons, and dressing-based salads such as cole slaw or potato



salad. Order salad dressings on the side. Lemon juice squeezed over your salad is a zesty, fat-free dressing and a natural flavor enhancer.

Breads. Breads are an important part of a varied diet, supplying starch, fiber, and some vitamins and minerals. Whole-grain breads such as wheat, bran, oat, and rye provide the greatest amount of fiber. Breads and other baked goods differ

widely in the fat and sugars they contain—croissants, biscuits, and hush puppies are usually much higher in fats than other breads. Use butter and other spreads sparingly.

Side Dishes. Make sure vegetables or starch side dishes are not fried or doused in butter. Whipped margarine may be available, or try low-fat Italian dressing on your potato or vegetable for more pizzazz. The more simple your choices, the lower in fat and calories they most likely will be.

Beverages. Water is the ultimate thirst quencher! Sparkling water with lemon or lime is a delicious alternative to cocktails or carbonated colas. Drink coffee or tea plain or limit use of sugar and cream.

Dessert. Dessert need not be left out. Fresh fruit, fruit ices, sherbets, plain gelatin, or angel food cake are good finishing





touches to a meal. If you can't resist a rich dessert, try splitting it with a friend.

Breakfast. Start breakfast with fresh fruit or a small glass of juice. Add whole-grain bread or a dry toasted English muffin. Pre-sweetened cereals often have more sugar than you would add to unsweetened cereals. Except for granolas, most cereals (hot or cold) are low in fat. Skim and low fat milk provide the same nutrients but lower calories and less fat than whole milk. Most breakfast meats are high in fat and sodium, but ham and Canadian bacon are leaner than regular bacon and sausage.

Chinese. Choose Asian dishes that are boiled, steamed, or lightly stir-fried in vegetable oil rather than sautéed. Enjoy steamed rice instead of fried. Avoid high-sodium soups. Ask for sauces on the side and

request no MSG or salt. Hunan and Szechwan-style food is high in calories when the meat is fried in hot oil.

Thai. Most Thai meals consist of many different items, including soup, a steamed dish, a fried dish, a hot salad, and many dips and sauces. Most Thai soups are clear and relatively healthy. Skip the fried dish since the rest of the meal should be plenty to fill you up. Most Thai sauces

are vegetable or seafood-based and should be healthy choices. Stir-fried vegetables cooked in light oil are a Thai favorite. Pick steamed rice instead of fried to go with your meal. Fresh fruit is a popular Thai dessert and a great way to complete your dining experience.

Italian. Pasta dishes can be low fat if not ladled with cheese, fatty meats, butter, or cream sauces. Marinara and Marsala sauces are usually lower in fat. Scaloppini or parmesan dishes are usually higher in fat. Pasta primavera made with a small amount of oil and fresh vegetables is a good low fat dish. The appetizer portion of pasta may be large enough to be filling. Simply prepared chicken and fish dishes are your best bet.

Mexican. With added cheese, sour cream, and fried tortillas and beans, Mexican food has many high fat menu items. But whole grains are staples of Mexican dishes and tortillas.



When made with corn and baked rather than fried they can be a nice addition to your diet. Shrimp or chicken tostados on a non-fried cornmeal tortilla with rice and beans can be high in fiber and low in fat.

Vending Machines. Vending machines can be a source of empty calories as well as an added expense. Choices such as pretzels, raisins, dried fruit, fruit juice, trail mix, peanut butter crackers, fig bar cookies, or gingersnaps are much better alternatives than nuts, cookies, chips, candy bars, or soda pop.

Eating for good health doesn't have to be dull. You don't have to give up your favorite foods either. Balance higher calorie, fat, and sodium foods with other menu items that are lower. Or choose lower calorie, fat, and sodium foods at other meals. Adding physical activity to your day can balance out those extra calories. Remember the key is to think about the nutritional value of your food.

Bon appétit!



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