



Eating Out

Eating at a restaurant does not have to sabotage a healthy diet. Use smart-eating strategies: plan ahead, consider the menu and choose foods carefully to keep you on your plan.

Preparation

- Have a plan. Eat a light dinner if you ate a big lunch that day. Or if you know ahead of time that you're going to a restaurant, cut back on calories during other meals that day.
- Knowing menu terms and cooking basics makes ordering easier, especially if you need to control calories, fat and other nutrients. Look for foods that are steamed, broiled, baked or grilled, and limit fried and sautéed items or foods described as "crispy," "rich" or "au gratin."

Choosing a Restaurant

- Think ahead. Consider meal options at different restaurants and look for places with a wide range of menu items. Check online menus if available for menu and nutrition information.
- Check out Healthy Dining Finder (www.healthydiningfinder.com) for info on healthy local restaurant faire.

Ordering

- Balance your meal by including foods from all the different food groups: meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables, and grains. Look for freshly made entrée salads that give you "balance in a bowl." For example, entrée salads with chicken, cheese or seafood provide protein along with fiber and vitamins. If you are counting calories, use a low-fat dressing or skip some of the extras, like croutons.
- For sandwich toppings, go with low-fat options like lettuce, tomato and onion; use condiments like ketchup, mustard or relish; and low-fat dressings.
- Round out your meal by ordering healthy side dishes, such as a side salad with low-fat dressing, baked potato or fruit. Boost the nutritional value of your baked potato by topping it with vegetables, salsa or chili.
- Substitute. Ask for a side salad with low-fat dressing to replace fries in a combination meal.
- Many restaurants honor requests, so don't be afraid to be assertive, ask menu questions and make special requests to meet your nutritional needs.
- Many restaurants serve huge portions, sometimes enough for two or three people. Share an entrée with a friend. Order menu items that contain fewer calories and eat a smaller portion. Bring leftovers home for another meal. Or, order an appetizer in place of an entrée and add a small salad.

Eating

- Eat slowly. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you are no longer hungry. Fast eaters often are overeaters, while slow eaters tend to eat less and are still satisfied.

Eating Out with Kids

- Choose a restaurant that caters to children and has a healthy children's menu that includes smaller portion sizes and meals designed to provide ample nourishment for smaller bodies.
- For kids' meals, opt for milk as a beverage and fruit for dessert.
- Order plain foods with sauce on the side.
- Substitute healthier "sides" in place of fries, like carrots or apple slices.
- Choose two or three suitable menu items, then let your child pick one.
- Let kids order their familiar favorites when they eat out. For new foods, offer a bite or two from your order.
- Calcium is important at all ages, but especially for growing bones. To get more calcium, drink low-fat or fat-free white or chocolate milk or add a slice of cheese to their sandwich. Choose dairy-based treats like yogurt, a smoothie or frozen dairy dessert.

Restaurants may be intimidating to people trying to stick to a healthy diet, but with preparation and confidence, you can enjoy your restaurant meal without abandoning healthy eating.

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