

Watch What You Eat!

Tips For Eating Healthy When Dining Out

By Jessica Soldavini, MPH, RD

Is it really possible to eat healthy when dining out? While restaurant meals are often high in calories, unhealthy fats, sodium and sugar, it is possible to make healthier choices. Here are some tips for eating healthy when dining out.

Watch your portions

Restaurant portions are often very large. Consider splitting an entrée with a friend. You can also ask for a to-go box and take home half your meal. Sometimes it can be hard to stop eating once you get started so pack up half of your meal before you start eating.

Take control over what you eat

Items like salad dressings, butter and condiments add calories, fat and sodium to meals. Restaurants often load up meals with these items so ask for them "on the side" so that you have control over how much you eat.

Pay attention to how food is prepared

Watch out for menu items that include terms like Alfredo, au gratin, creamed, crispy, cheese sauce, fried and hollandaise as these items are typically high in calories and unhealthy fats. Instead, look for items that are baked, broiled, grilled, poached or roasted. If you are unsure of how something is prepared or what some of the terms describing an item means, then ask.

Make healthy substitutions and don't be afraid to ask for special requests

Many restaurants offer healthier alternatives. This may include whole grain options such as whole grain bread, whole grain pasta or brown rice. You can also ask for fresh fruit, a salad or vegetables instead of French fries. Even if healthier alternatives aren't listed as an option for the item you plan to order, don't be afraid to ask. Many restaurants will be happy to honor your request if they have the alternative item available.

Check the nutrition information

Many restaurants list nutrition information on menus or menu boards so be sure to take advantage of this information. Nutrition information for restaurants is also often available online so you can plan what you are going to order before even getting to the restaurant.

Drink water

A large 30-ounce soda adds about 380 calories and over a quarter pound of sugar to your meal! Not only will you drink less calories and added sugars by ordering water, you will also save money. While it is not always advertised, even fast food restaurants will give you a free cup of water if you ask.

Balance out what you eat

If you plan on ordering a high fat, high calorie entrée, try eating lighter meals the rest of the day. If you are going to order a dessert, choose a healthier entrée.

As you can see, there are many ways to make healthier choices when dining out. While it is best to choose healthier options most of the time, remember that it is okay to splurge every once in a while and order that not so healthy option that you enjoy.

