

7 Optimal Choices for Eating Out

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Key Points

- Not all restaurants are equal. Choose the restaurant wisely.
- Eating out can be healthy if careful meal selections are made.
- Selecting fruits and vegetables as a part of the meal adds vitamins, minerals and fiber, and helps reduce fat and calories.
- Fast food restaurants have healthy alternatives to the high-fat burger and fries. Make sensible food choices.

The trend toward eating more meals away from home reflects a growing demand for convenience, entertainment, and a variety of ethnically diverse foods. Active schedules, training requirements, and deployments make eating a majority of meals away from home appealing—it is simpler than cooking at home. Americans eat at least one-third of their calories away from home. To maximize mental agility, stamina, and health, healthy food and beverage selections are critical when eating out at fast food places, dining facilities, restaurants, social events, or when traveling. This chapter will present information on how to maintain a high-performance diet when eating away from home.

Choose Restaurants Wisely

On average, many foods prepared and eaten out tend to be less nutrient dense and have more calories than foods prepared at home. However, restaurant and fast food meals do not have to be unhealthy. By being informed and by asking appropriate questions, the guidelines of a healthy diet can be maintained and the benefits of eating out can be enjoyed. The good news is that when you don't want to cook, are too busy, or just want to enjoy a dining out experience, it is possible to eat healthy. Some suggestions on how to choose a restaurant include:

- Plan ahead: Select a restaurant where food is cooked to order rather than where the food is made ahead of time.
- Avoid places with dessert carts and all-you-can-eat or buffet-only specials.



- Try Greek restaurants that serve Mediterranean-type meals.
- Choose healthy ethnic foods from Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Indian, Italian, French, and Middle Eastern eateries.
- Skip the hot dogs and pizza and search for fast food places that offer healthy options such as fruit, yogurt, soup, sushi, salads, sandwiches, or wraps.
- Look for a place that offers menus with nutrition information.
- Find a place to eat before you're starving or you will tend to choose quickly. Plan ahead and give yourself time to choose. If you are very hungry, buy an apple or other healthy snack to tide you over.

Choosing a Nutritious Meal

Once at your restaurant of choice, read the menu carefully to select a high carbohydrate, nutrient dense meal. The following menu strategies are usually available in most restaurants. Select a hearty meal that fits into your nutrition plan. The following guidance will assist with meal selections.

Appetizers

Appetizers are tasty but they cause mindless nibbling, which adds fat and calories. If you're starving, have the bread but skip the butter. Have the waiter remove the bowl of chips or peanuts, or the basket of bread, after you've had a small portion. Select an appetizer that is neither fried nor covered with cheese.

Soups can be a great appetizer or entrée.

Many soups are low in calories and will help fill you up and satisfy your hunger. Select a broth or other light soup, such as a vegetable soup. Avoid cream soups which are high in fat.

Salads are more than just rabbit food.

Fresh vegetable salads are great, but ask for a balsamic vinaigrette, a fat-free, or a reduced-calorie salad dressing on the side to control how much or how little you add.

If a salad bar is included in the meal, avoid cheese, croutons, fried or crispy meat, bacon bits, potato and Caesar salads, creamed pastas, and coleslaw. In other words, keep it simple. Fill the plate with lettuce, spinach, other greens, and all the colorful vegetables. Add juicy red tomatoes, bright orange shaved carrots, green peas, yellow and red bell peppers, dark green broccoli, white cauliflower, crispy cucumbers, and other vegetables to turn your greens into a fiesta of colors.



Main Meal

The main course, or main meal, can be a healthy affair.

- Choose entrees with fruits and vegetables as key ingredients. Enjoy the flavors they offer. Fruits and vegetables are a good source of dietary fiber, as well as a source of many vitamins and minerals. Or, order a side of fresh, steamed veggies and make it a meal.
- If you want to eat less, order two appetizers, or an appetizer and a salad, or soup and ½ sandwich as your meal. Ensure you are ordering the low-fat options. Or, if portions at the restaurant are large, split one meal with your dinner partner.

Meat/Fish

A reasonable portion of steak or other meat is 3–6 oz. Meat portions should be about the size of a deck of cards, not the size of your plate. Pass on gravies or heavy sauces, which add a significant amount of fat. Season your meat with pepper, chunky salsa, or herbs.

- Chicken can be great if it is not fried or consumed with its skin.
- Pork, “the other white meat,” is good, but can be fatty. Skip the ribs and go for a ham steak instead.
- Select healthy food preparations. Ask that the meat or fish be steamed, poached, broiled, baked, grilled, or roasted instead of deep-fried or prepared in butter or oil.

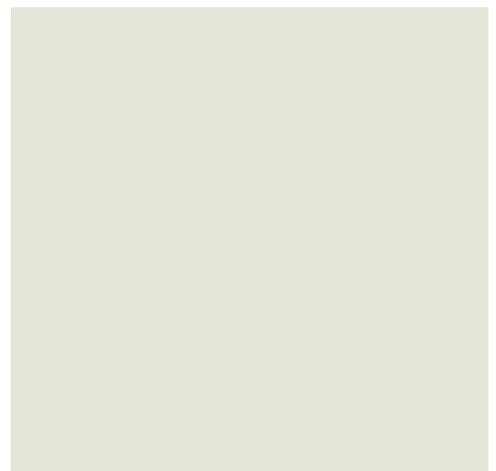
Starches/Carbohydrates

Several tips for ordering carbohydrates:

- Order a baked potato (without the sour cream and butter) or plain rice—not fried rice. Avoid onion rings, other fried vegetables and au gratin or Delmonico potatoes.
- Order pasta with marinara (tomato-based sauce), not cream sauce.
- Ask for salsa or chives with a baked potato instead of high-fat sour cream, butter, cheese, or bacon. They are very low in calories and a healthy alternative with a lot of flavor.
- Choose whole-grain bread and dishes made with brown rice.
- Beans, while usually a good choice, may have been prepared with unhealthy lard. Ask your server how they are prepared.

Vegetables

Order two servings of steamed vegetables when possible. Stay away from cheesy and battered, deep-fried vegetables or those prepared in oil or butter. Grilled vegetables are a great option.



Other Main Courses

Casseroles

Casseroles are tasty but can be very high in fat and calories. Avoid casseroles and foods with heavy cream or cheese sauces. Pot pies are primarily high-fat gravy with little meat or vegetables.

Pastas

When ordering pasta dishes, look for tomato-based sauces (marinara) rather than cream-based sauces. Tomato-based sauces are much lower in fat and calories. In addition, the tomato sauce can count as a vegetable: a win-win situation. To help fill you up, order an extra serving of steamed vegetables to mix with your pasta. If you add meat, select grilled chicken or salmon instead of the sausage. Add a small amount of grated Parmesan cheese for additional flavor.

Sandwiches

Sometimes you aren't hungry or don't have time for a long sit-down meal. In that case, a sandwich is a great alternative. Here are some helpful tips about ordering a healthy sandwich:

- Select sandwiches on whole wheat, pita, multi-grain breads. Choose low-fat deli meats and cheeses, mustard, relish, ketchup, or low-fat mayonnaise. Add flavor and vitamins with roasted sweet peppers, lettuce, tomato, jalapenos, and chopped olives (small amount).
- Order sandwiches with mustard rather than mayonnaise or "special sauce." Mustard adds zing with virtually no calories.

Beverages

It is important to stay adequately hydrated, but an easy way to gain weight is by drinking sodas, alcohol, and milk, which only add unnecessary, empty calories. With or in between meals, select water, diluted fruit juice, skim or low-fat milk, or unsweetened tea or coffee. Energy drinks, CHO-electrolyte beverages, sweetened tea, and juice drinks can promote weight gain.

If wine is desired, have one glass with the main dish. Drink water with a wedge of lemon while waiting for the main entree.



Drink only one glass of wine very slowly. Take time to enjoy the taste by sipping it slowly rather than just consuming it.

Dessert

Try an herbal tea or decaffeinated coffee. If you can't resist dessert, order sorbet, fresh berries or fruit, sorbet, frozen yogurt, or ice milk. Angel food cake with strawberries, plain Jell-O, or poached fruit is a refreshing dessert. If you want something outrageous, split it with your dining partner or eat half only.

Share a dessert with a friend.
Half the dessert equals half the calories.

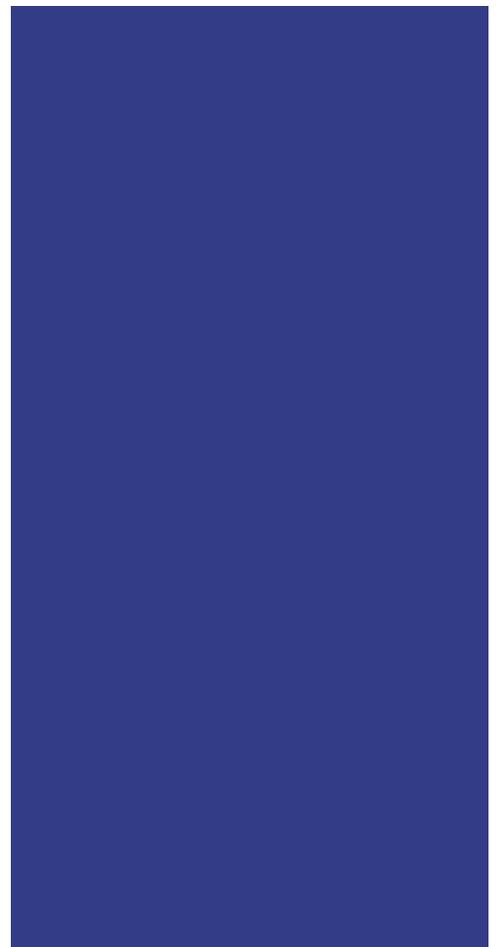
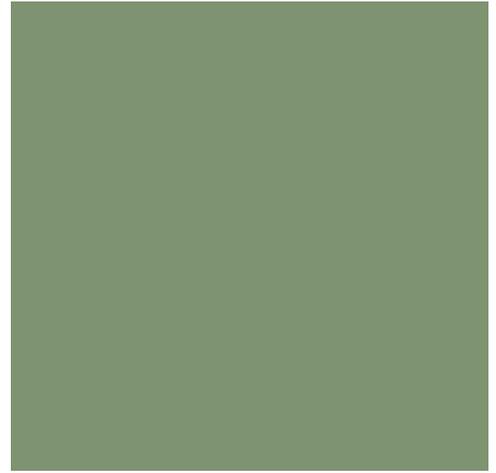
Other Helpful Tips:

- Stop eating when you are full—your body gives you satiety clues.
- Eat slowly and take time to taste and savor the food. Enjoy your dinner conversation.
- Remember not to deprive yourself of foods you love. All foods can fit into a well-balanced diet. Small portions are the key.
- Ask how an appealing dish is prepared and request healthy substitutions (baked instead of fried, olive oil instead of butter).
- Ask for a “doggie bag” up front and set aside half of your meal prior to eating. This will help ensure that you will not overeat. You will have another meal of your leftovers the next day.
- Try to avoid dishes described as au gratin, buttered, buttery, creamed, crispy, escalloped, fried, hash, hollandaise, in cheese sauce, in cream sauce, in gravy, pan-fried, pot pie, rich, sautéed, stewed, and with bacon or sausage.

Fruit and Vegetables When Eating Out

Remember, when it comes to fruit and vegetables, **more matters**. Order these items when eating out:

- Select 100% fruit or vegetable juices for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a snack.
- Order a fruit cup for breakfast to get a good day's start.
- Make a lunch meal out of vegetable soup and a side salad.



- Order sandwiches or wraps that include vegetables, such as lettuce, tomato, sprouts, green pepper, cucumber, or other raw vegetables.
- Select an apple, orange, or banana—perfect fast food when on the run.

Table 7–1. Do’s and Don’ts of Ordering When Eating Out

Do’s	Don’ts
100% fruit juice.	Juice (many juices have corn syrup).
Fresh fruit or fresh fruit cup.	Fruit in syrup.
Steamed vegetables.	Fried vegetables or cooked in butter.
Wraps and burritos without mayo.	Hoagie or sub roll with mayo.
Extra vegetables or any vegetable combination.	French fries, fried vegetables, salads with lots of creamy dressing.
Vegetable pizza (with > 3 veggies).	“Meat lover’s” pizza.
Baked potato or sweet potato.	French fries or potato salad.
Salad bar.	Skip the lettuce and go straight for the mayonnaise pastas.
Fresh fruit with low-fat whipped cream.	Tarts, cheese cake, Danishes, and other pastries.

Fast Foods

Fast foods are a way of life!

Selecting fast food items that will meet your nutrient requirements and match your activity patterns and performance demands is possible at fast food restaurants. Fast foods can provide the protein, carbohydrate, and

adequate vitamins and minerals, but it takes careful planning. The carbohydrate, protein, and fat (CPF) distribution of typical fast food meals is illustrated. Often 40%–60% of the calories are from fat. Also, most menu items are very high in sodium, which can contribute to high blood pressure, and dietary fiber is usually lacking or quite low. Americans consume about half the recommended daily amount of fiber.

Suggestions for Choosing Fast Foods

- Look for meals that provide 800–900 calories, have < 30 grams of fat and < 1,000 milligrams of sodium.
- Select regular size portions and avoid jumbo-, giant-, deluxe-, and super-sized options.
- Balance a fast food meal with the rest of the day's dietary intake.
- Order a single burger without special toppings and sauces.
- Avoid chicken and fish that are breaded and fried.
- Select cheese or vegetarian pizzas. Avoid extra cheese, pepperoni and sausage since they contribute additional fat.

Table 7–2. Substitutions at Fast Food Restaurants

Skip This	Try Instead	Calories Saved
Double cheeseburger	Cheeseburger	280
Super fries	Small fries	330
Burrito supreme	Soft chicken taco	209
Stuffed potato	Baked potato, plain	348
Pepperoni lovers pizza	Cheese pizza, 2 slices	174
Large regular soda	Spritzer water	310
Breaded chicken sandwich	Grilled chicken	205

[Click for sample breakfasts, lunches, and dinners](#) that would be considered nutritionally adequate, in terms of CHO, protein and fat (CPF) content; however, they are all high in sodium.

[Click to obtain the nutrient content of most fast foods.](#)

Fast Foods and the Web

Many fast-food restaurants have their menus on the web—here are a few to check out.

- Taco Bell:
<http://www.yum.com/nutrition/menu.asp>
- Kentucky Fried Chicken:
<http://www.kfc.com/nutrition/zerotransfat.asp>
- McDonalds:
http://www.mcdonalds.com/usa/eat/nutrition_info.html
- Pizza Hut:
<http://www.pizzahut.com/Nutrition.aspx>
- Subway:
<http://www.subway.com/subwayroot/MenuNutrition/index.aspx>
- Dunkin Donuts:
<http://www.dunkindonuts.com/aboutus/nutrition/>
- Starbucks:
http://www.starbucks.com/retail/nutrition_info.asp
- Arby's:
<http://www.arbys.com/nutrition/>
- Chick-Fil-A:
<http://www.chick-fil-a.com/Nutrition.asp>
- Domino's:
www.dominos.com/PublicEN/Site+Content/Primary/See+the+Menu
- Wendy's:
<http://www.wendys.com/food/NutritionLanding.jsp>
- Burger King:
<http://www.bk.com/#menu=3,-1,-1>
- Five Guys:
<http://www.fiveguys.com/menu.html>
- Popeyes:
http://www.popeyes.com/nutrition/pop_nutrition.pdf