

Kit 28

# *Healthy* EATING OUT



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**HEALTH EDCO®**

## What We Are Eating

Many people consume more than 20 teaspoons of added sugar daily. Fat and sweet intakes are above recommendations. More people are obese than ever before.

When we look at many people's eating habits, we find some alarming trends—too much sugar and fat, fewer healthy food choices, and an increasing incidence of obesity. Although experts give a number of reasons for our poor eating habits, one obvious reason is the increase in eating out. Each year, a substantial amount of many people's food budget is spent on restaurant and fast foods. No longer do we reserve eating out for special occasions—it has become a daily event for many of us.

### DISADVANTAGES

- More fat and cholesterol
- More salt
- More calories
- More sugar
- Less nutritional balance and variety
- Larger portions



### ADVANTAGES

- Convenience
- Taste and flavor
- No cooking or cleaning
- Entertainment
- Relaxation

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When we weigh the pros and cons, we find that eating out has many advantages. Two-career families, the lack of time for cooking at home, and the wide variety of choices available for meals away from home are some of the reasons we are eating out more. As families spend less time in the kitchen, cooking skills decrease. The result is a greater acceptance of eating out regularly.

However, eating out has several disadvantages. Foods eaten out generally have more fat, calories, sugar, and sodium than foods prepared at home. Food groups are not balanced in the meal, and portions are too large. These add to the existing dietary problems caused by too much fat, salt, sugar, and calories. For the growing number of people with health concerns, the disadvantages of eating out outweigh the advantages.



### “Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too”

How can you enjoy the convenience of eating out and still maintain good health? You can start by assessing health and nutrition concerns. For example, a person with diabetes should watch for extra dietary sugars. Limiting sodium is helpful for individuals with high blood pressure. Setting specific nutrition and health goals will help to make healthy eating out easier.

Next, consider balance, moderation, and variety when choosing foods for each meal. Balancing a high-fat food with a low-fat food within a meal will help to moderate fats in the meal overall. Balancing a high-sodium meal with other low-sodium meals throughout the day will help to moderate sodium for the day. The same idea applies to meals eaten out during the week. Consuming a variety of foods on a daily basis provides necessary vitamins and minerals. Balancing food groups, maintaining moderate portion sizes, and choosing a variety of foods are important to healthy eating. Finally, by using healthy strategies every step of the way, whether it is an appetizer or entree, Mexican or Italian food, you can increase your chances for success.

## Plan Healthy Strategies Before, During, and After Eating Out

### Before the Meal

Good planning is the secret ingredient for successful dining out. Planning allows you to select restaurants that have healthy alternatives. This is often overlooked when you make last-minute decisions. When trying new restaurants, call ahead or check online and ask for menu information. Many restaurants have nutrient analyses of menu items, which can help you to plan your order.

When planning to eat out, many people make the mistake of skipping meals to allow for "extra" calories or fat. Actually, this behavior can cause a person to become hungrier and to eat extra amounts of foods high in fat, calories, or sodium. A healthier option is to eat regularly scheduled meals and to budget more fat or sodium for the meal eaten out. Fat or sodium may be budgeted over an entire day or over a few days. Another great idea is to plan a healthy snack just before going out to eat. These strategies will help prevent overeating of less nutritious foods.

PLAN AHEAD



### Before the Meal

- Choose the restaurant carefully.
- Call ahead or check online for menu information.
- Use nutrition information.
- Don't skip meals before eating out.
- Budget fat or sodium for the day.
- Eat healthy snacks just before eating out.

### During the Meal

Being assertive and requesting what you want for your meal is the most important part of making healthy choices when ordering. Ask for details about how foods are prepared, and request healthy cooking techniques.

#### During the Meal

- Ask how food is prepared.
- Request healthy alternatives if they are not on the menu.
- Ask about portion size before ordering.
- Return foods not prepared as requested.
- Eat slowly.
- Relax & enjoy the meal.
- Use portion control.
- Stop when comfortable or full.

Healthy menu options may be available but not advertised, and you can ask specifically for them. Fresh fruit and vegetables, juice, and fat-free milk are examples of items available in most restaurants but often not mentioned on the menu. Also ask about the portion size of your order, and request a half order if available.

Once the meal has arrived, you can make your meal enjoyable and healthy. First, be assertive and return any item not prepared as you requested. In addition, savor the flavors by eating slowly, which helps you to feel full sooner. Enjoying the pleasures of eating out such as company, conversation, and atmosphere can also help.

### After the Meal

Because most restaurant portions are twice the recommended size, remember to ask for takeout containers to save leftovers for a quick meal later. If you want dessert, look for items lower in fats and dietary sugars. Requesting a small takeout menu and making notes about food choices, quality, and quantity can be very helpful for next time.

#### After the Meal

- Request takeout containers for leftovers.
- Request a takeout menu.
- Make notes for next time.

# Consider Each Course

## Appetizer

- Choose juice, coffee, hot tea, broth, fresh vegetables or fruit, or fat-free milk.
- Avoid or share fried finger foods.



## Entree/Side Dish

- Choose broiled, baked, or steamed foods.
- Avoid cream sauces, cheese, and gravy.
- Request half portions or takeout containers.
- Ask for specific preparations, such as not using butter.

## Beverage

- Choose tea, coffee, or water with lemon.
- Request fat-free milk and fresh juice.
- Use caution with alcoholic beverages.  
(Alcohol contains seven calories per gram.)



## Salad

- Have dressing on the side.
- Choose fat-free dressings or lemon/vinegar.
- Avoid high-fat toppings and crackers.



## Dessert

- Choose fruit, yogurt, or sorbet.
- Share with several people.
- Order a lower fat/calorie meal to allow for dessert.

# Choose the Cuisine Carefully

## Steakhouses

- Choose charbroiled, grilled, or stir-fried foods instead of deep-fried foods.
- Choose a baked potato instead of french fries.
- Have smaller amounts of margarine, sour cream, and cheese.
- Have salad with dressing on the side.
- Avoid prime cuts of meat.
- Ask for small, lean cuts of meat (loin or round in the name).



NOT  
FRIED

## Mexican

- Avoid chips served before the meal.
- Choose picante instead of cheese sauce.
- Request pico de gallo rather than guacamole or sour cream.
- Try a fajita or taco salad without the shell.
- Remember that rice and beans are a complete protein.
- Avoid chorizo (Mexican sausage).
- Choose flan over sopapillas for dessert.

## Cafeterias/Bufets

- Call ahead for special preparations.
- Request low-fat items if they are not on the buffet.
- Choose more variety but small portions.
- Order a senior or child's plate or a half order.
- Be sure to budget in dessert if you choose to have some.



LOW  
FAT

## Chinese

- Ask about preparation.
- Choose stir-fry, and request soy sauce.
- Request foods prepared without monosodium glutamate (MSG).
- Request steamed rice instead of stir-fried.
- Choose vegetables.
- Choose brown sauce—it is lower in fat.
- Avoid eating fried foods such as won-ton chips, Chinese noodles, and egg rolls.



## Greek

- Request a minimum of oil (even olive).
- Request pita bread.
- Choose fruit instead of high-fat pastries.
- Ask for olives on the side.
- Try dishes with rice or eggplant.



## Breakfast Houses

- Avoid buffet items high in fat/sodium.
- Order from the menu to control portions.
- Request egg substitutes or the "light" breakfast.
- Choose whole-grain cereals, toast, and English muffins.
- Ask for fat-free milk and yogurt.
- Choose fresh fruit and juices.
- Limit bacon, sausage, biscuits, eggs, fried potatoes, doughnuts, and pastries.



## Cajun

- Request boiled, grilled, or broiled seafood instead of fried.
- Avoid gumbo, etoufee, or dishes made with roux.
- Choose Creole and jambalaya dishes.
- Ask for steamed rice instead of "dirty" rice.
- Try red beans and rice without sausage.



## Seafood

- Choose grilled or broiled foods instead of fried.
- Choose cocktail sauce instead of tartar sauce.
- Request shellfish that is not breaded or fried.
- Avoid fried or buttery breads (hush puppies, garlic bread).
- Choose a baked potato instead of fries.

## Italian

- Choose pasta with tomato sauce.
- Avoid cheese and cream sauces.
- Ask for soups and salads with dressing on the side.
- Request plain breadsticks.
- Choose Canadian bacon or vegetable pizza; limit olives and pepperoni.
- Avoid Alfredo, parmigiana, or "stuffed" foods.



## French

- Request French bread instead of croissants.
- Ask for "nouvelle cuisine," which is lighter.
- Avoid Hollandaise, Mornay, or Bernaise sauces.
- Try not to eat foods that are prepared "au gratin."
- Request tomato/herb sauces.

## Italian Restaurant MEAL MAKEOVER

Before	Fat (grams)	After	Fat (grams)
Fettucine Alfredo dinner	97	Spaghetti with marinara sauce	15
Garlic bread	5	Bread without butter	1
Garden salad with dressing	7	Minestrone soup	2
Unsweetened iced tea	0	Unsweetened iced tea	0
<b>Total Fat</b>	<b>109g</b>	<b>Total Fat</b>	<b>18g</b>



# Fast Food

Although some healthy eaters may avoid fast-food restaurants, other people have learned how fast food can provide a quick, healthy option. Fast foods are convenient, consistent, and inexpensive. Most fast-food restaurants offer healthy options and provide nutritional information about their foods. As a result, health-conscious customers can enjoy all of the advantages of fast food with healthier choices.

## Hamburgers

- Request nutrition brochures.
- Check nutritional values.
- Find healthier, acceptable alternatives.
- Choose:
  - small hamburger without cheese
  - mustard instead of mayo
  - salads with fat-free dressings
  - broiled chicken meals
  - baked potato or pasta bar



## Fried Chicken

- Choose original batter instead of extra crispy.
- Check for rotisserie or roasted chicken.
- Limit number of pieces of chicken.
- Include side items to reduce total fat in meal.

## Sandwich Shops

- Choose six inch (15-centimeter), round deli sandwiches, or child-size portion.
- Hold the mayonnaise, olives, and extra cheese.
- Choose turkey, ham, and vegetables.
- Look for baked chips.



## CAUTION

- French fries
- High-fat breakfast items
- Advertised specials
- Combo meals

## STOP

- Super size
- Double meat
- Double cheese



# Faster Than Fast Food

For times when fast food is not fast enough, you can look to convenience stores, grocery stores, or vending machines for meal or snack options. Although these options do not provide the healthiest choices, they do offer an alternative to skipping meals. Convenience stores can accommodate healthy snackers or those looking for a complete meal. Larger stores offer more variety in healthy foods and may even have a fast-food restaurant or sandwich shop attached. Several low-fat items can be found for meals or snacks. The Nutrition Facts label is on every food package, which can help you make better decisions.

## Convenience Stores

- Choose a larger store or one with a restaurant attached.
- Buy individual bags of pretzels or oil-free chips.
- Look for bottled water, sugar-free tea/soft drinks, or fat-free milk.
- Choose refrigerated sandwiches with lean meats.
- Try low-fat snack cakes, vanilla wafers, fig bars, popsicles, or hard sweets.
- Avoid hot links, fried foods, and other “freshly prepared” hot items.



## Grocery Stores

- Check for a salad bar or hot buffet line.
- Buy fresh bagels or bread from the bakery.
- Make a sandwich with sliced low-fat deli meat or cheese.
- Choose cold cut lunches, canned meats, and low-fat crackers.
- Buy frozen low-fat dinners for microwaving.
- Remember fresh fruit and vegetables.



The local grocery store can provide another option for a quick, healthy meal, whether it is the daily lunch routine, a meal on the road, or a take-home supper. Grocery stores can be much less expensive than convenience stores or vending machines.

## Vending Machines

- Choose healthy snack foods—pretzels, fig bars, raisins, juice, fruit, and hard candy—instead of chocolate, cookies, and snack cakes.
- Look for nutrition labels.



## Vending Machines

may offer healthy choices and another alternative to skipping meals. Make sensible choices, and avoid using the snack machine as an excuse to choose higher-fat foods. Check the Nutrition Facts label once you have purchased the food, and make a mental note for next time.



## Enjoy the Convenience of Eating Out ...

Healthy choices can be a part of any dining experience, but healthy eating takes awareness and action. Understanding nutrition basics and identifying personal health goals are the first steps in evaluating restaurant and fast foods. Then, with planning and practice, you can enjoy eating out and good health.

## ... and Make Healthy Choices

- Assess personal health concerns and nutrition needs.
- Use balance, moderation, and variety.
- Practice healthy strategies before, during, and after eating out.
- Consider each menu course.
- Choose the cuisine carefully.
- Know fast-food facts.
- Use healthy strategies when eating on the run.



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