Eating Out Healthfully

HEALTH ACTION GUIDE

Whether it's a celebration meal, a working lunch or just drive-thru fast food on the way to the kids' soccer game, most of us eat out a lot. How often do you eat out? Don't forget to include breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

Calculate how many meals or snacks you typically eat out each week: _____

The average person eats out approximately five times a week. While restaurant eating is often enjoyable and convenient, the downside is that you give up a certain amount of control over the food you eat (large portions, hidden fats, salt and calories).

Of course, one option is to simply eat out less often. For example, bringing a lunch or snacks to work lets you control what you eat at those times. Assuming that there are times when you want or need to eat out, you can do so healthfully by planning ahead, watching your food budget and making wise choices.

THREE WAYS TO STAY IN CHARGE OF EATING OUT

1. Plan Ahead

Taking charge of a situation usually means thinking and planning ahead.

- Ask yourself the following questions before you walk into a restaurant:
  - When will I be eating out?
  - Where will I go?
  - What healthy choices might be available?
  - When I order, what simple requests can make my selection a healthier option?
- Try these strategies:
  - Plan to get more exercise on days you eat out.
  - If possible, review a menu beforehand to see if there are any healthy selections.
  - Visualize yourself ordering a healthy selection, sipping water, eating slowly, enjoying conversation and stopping when you are satisfied. This "mental rehearsal" can make it easier to resist impulsive decisions or succumbing to old habits.

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2. Watch Your Food "Budget"

If you know you will be visiting a restaurant where it will be hard to stick with your healthy eating plan, make allowances either before or after the meal to help even the score. You can also do some "budgeting" at the restaurant. For example:

- Split an entrée with a dining partner.
- Eat half of the food on your plate and take the rest home for another meal. Tip: Order once—enjoy twice! Request a to-go container as soon as your meal is served so you can divvy it up and set aside for another meal.
- Order à la carte (portions tend to be smaller and don't provide as many "extras") or order an appetizer and side salad for your meal.
- While you're waiting for your meal to be served, avoid or go easy on complimentary foods such as bread, rolls and chips.
- Skip the appetizer and condiments.
- Share a dessert.
- If you drink alcohol, remember that it also contains calories. Ordering seltzer, club soda or diet soda instead of an alcoholic beverage will cut calories. If you choose to drink, try having one glass of water in between each alcoholic beverage.

3. Speak Up About Your Food Preferences

If you are unsure how a particular dish is prepared or are concerned it may contain hidden fat and sodium, simply ask. Many people are interested in eating healthier, so you won't be the first to inquire about different menu options. Most restaurants will honor your requests. Some questions to ask the server:

- Can the food be prepared differently? For example, if you see sautéed vegetables on the menu, ask if they can be steamed instead.
- May I have the salad dressing served on the side?
- May I substitute an item with a healthier option? For example, if ordering a Chef's salad, ask to have turkey instead of ham (and without croutons or with croutons placed on the side). If an entrée is served with French fries and a vegetable, ask for a baked potato or two servings of vegetables in place of fries.

Helpful Tips While You're Eating

- Eat slowly and savor every bite.
- Put your utensils down and take breaks to gauge how full you feel.
- Sip water in between bites.
- Take breaks from eating to enjoy the conversation with your dining companions.
- Ask the server to remove the bread, butter or other condiments.
- If you know you will keep eating something just because it is there, move your plate to the side to let your server know that you are ready to have it cleared.

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THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO DINING OUT

Use this guide to help you make the best choices when eating out.

CHOOSE	LIMIT
For starters: • Raw vegetables or fresh fruit • Clear, bean, tomato or broth-based soups • Green salads (without cheese or meat, dressing on the side) • Non-fat or low-fat dressings • Seafood (non-fried) with cocktail sauce or lemon	**For starters:** • Cream or cheese-based soups • Caesar salads, egg salads, macaroni salads • Fried vegetables, chicken or seafood • Nachos • Potato skins • Pâtés • Cheeses
For the main course: • Lean meats, grilled, broiled or served au jus • Fish or poultry—grilled, baked or broiled without butter; steamed or poached in wine; lemon or lime juices • Pasta with marinara sauce • Salads topped with grilled, baked or broiled seafood or poultry	**For the main course:** • Any item (meat, fish or poultry) with the following: buttered, creamed or in a cheese sauce; breaded; fried; battered; crispy; or in a béarnaise or hollandaise sauce
On the side: • Raw or steamed vegetables without butter or sauces • Whole-wheat pasta, rice (preferably brown), boiled or baked potato (preferably yam or sweet) • Whole-grain breads, rolls, breadsticks or pita bread	**On the side:** • Sautéed, fried or creamed vegetables • Mashed, scalloped or au gratin potatoes • Fried rice • Biscuits • Croissants • Muffins • Garlic, corn or sweet bread
The finale: • Ices, sherbets, sorbets • "Mini" dessert (miniature version of popular desserts) • Angel food cake • Fresh fruit	**The finale:** • Ice cream • Mousse • Custard • Crème bruleè • Cakes • Pies • Pastries • Cookies

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CHOOSE	LIMIT
Beverages: • Water • Seltzer • Sugar-free sodas • Fruit juice spritzers • Vegetable juices • Unsweetened iced tea • Herbal teas	**Beverages:** • Alcoholic drinks • Regular soda • Coffee or cappuccino made with cream, sugar, whole milk or flavored syrups
Fast foods: • Garden salad • Salad with grilled chicken, seafood or turkey • Plain hamburger with extra tomato and lettuce • Grilled chicken sandwich (hold the mayo) • Plain baked potato • Vegetarian burgers • Soft chicken or bean tacos • 100% juice • Low-fat or non-fat frozen yogurt • Ices or sherbets	**Fast foods:** • French fries • Fried onion rings • Loaded double burgers • Added cheese • Fried chicken • Fried fish sandwiches • Tacos with cheese, sour cream, guacamole • Ice cream, shakes, frappes • Soda • Pies

THE NEXT STEP

Congratulations! You've taken the first step toward being in charge when you eat out. To be successful, you must recognize that you are in charge. It is always your right to eat as well and as wisely as you choose.

The next time you visit a restaurant, practice putting one of your take-charge techniques into action. Once you're comfortable with that technique, try adding another. As time goes on, choosing heart-healthy foods in restaurants will be second nature. You'll feel good about yourself. You might even enjoy your food more!

The next time I eat out I will try the following take-charge technique(s):

_____

_____

Finally, sometimes it may be best to simply order what you really want, especially if you don't eat out frequently. If you don't satisfy your taste now, you may overeat later. Just eat smaller portions and bring some home so you can enjoy it twice.

This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your doctor for advice about changes that may affect your health.

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