

## Dining Out

Dining out is a favorite way to celebrate special events, enjoy a good meal without all of the clean-up, nourish while on-the-go, or connect with family and friends. Many of us eat in restaurants several times a week. We all know that, in general, restaurants serve large portions of foods that tend to be higher in fat and calories than home cooked meals. Thinking through your food choices ahead of time can help you keep fat and calories in line when dining out. See if you can pick up some new strategies to enhance the positive nutrition impact of your restaurant meals.

**Get the facts.** You can often look at restaurant menu and nutrition information before you head out the door by looking at the restaurant's website. Choose restaurants that provide nutrition information over those that do not. Some restaurants identify healthier fare on the menu. Use caution--these options are often lower in fat and calories, but not necessarily in sugar.

**Have it "your way."** Look at the menu creatively and don't be afraid to ask for what you want. If you would like shrimp cocktail as your entrée, the sauce left off your dish or the breakfast melon for dessert, ask. Ask how things are prepared and if alternatives are available, such as grilled chicken breast in place of crispy fried chicken tenders on a salad.

**Keep portions small.** Ask for a "to go" container at the beginning of a meal. Put the extra food in it right away rather than waiting until the end of the meal. Split meals. Order a healthy appetizer or a la carte rather than an entire meal. Avoid buffets or all-you-can-eat specials.

**Watch the fat.** Order baked, broiled or steamed in place of fried. Ask for high fat sauces or dressings on the side. Avoid croissants, biscuits, quiches, pastries, pot pies. Substitute a baked potato or a side of vegetables for French fries. Skip the mayonnaise or special sauce. Limit cheese. Choose wisely at the salad bar--avoid potato salad, pasta salad, marinated vegetables, and creamy dressings. Choose broth-based soups over cream soups.

### Healthful Italian Dining

Low fat pasta, nutrient-rich tomato sauces, heart-healthy olive oil, and health-promoting garlic are reasons to choose Italian foods. Take these steps to insure that your Italian meal is healthy.

- Choose a light olive oil and vinegar-based dressing for your salad; hold the croutons, cheese and creamy dressings.

- Hold the bread basket. The garlic butter makes bread difficult to resist when it is right in front of you.
- Choose minestrone soup, grilled calamari, grilled eggplant, grilled peppers, prosciutto with melon, or chilled gazpacho as an appetizer or as your entrée. Italian appetizers are often rich in vegetables.
- Consider a chicken dish with a tomato-based sauce.
- Choose a small side order of pasta and a side of vegetables: mix together and top with a tomato-based sauce.
- Order pasta with tomato or red/white clam sauce.
- If you really want a high fat sauce, ask for it on the side and use sparingly--a little flavorful sauce goes a long way.
- Hold or limit the cheese.
- Avoid fat and calorie laden alfredo sauce, carbonara sauce and parmigiana dishes.
- Choose thin crust pizza with light cheese and loads of vegetables.

### **Healthful Mexican Dining**

Rich spices and a wide variety make Mexican dining a favorite. If you know how to navigate the high fat options and limit portions, Mexican foods can be a healthy choice.

- One of the biggest dangers can be the chip basket. Ask everyone to put a small handful on his or her side plate and send the basket back with the waiter. Enjoy chips with low fat, nutrient-rich salsa. Guacamole is a concentrated source of fat and calories. If it is a favorite, control the portion.
- Chicken, shrimp or steak fajitas are rich in flavor and vegetables. Enjoy with a generous serving of salsa and a small sprinkling of cheese, sour cream or guacamole. Enjoy with or without the flour tortilla.
- Grilled chicken dishes and chicken tacos are often lower fat options.
- Pile on lettuce, tomato, salsa, picante sauce or fresh Pico de Gallo for authentic flavor without the fat.
- Look for Mexican restaurants with fresh veggies, grilled chicken and seafood, fresh salsa and beans.
- Chili, chicken chili, or black bean soup make great appetizers or entrees.
- Rather than ordering a traditional taco salad, which can top 1000 calories, order a side salad and grilled chicken, and top with fresh Pico de Gallo, a small dollop of sour cream or guacamole, and a few crushed taco chips for crunch—no need for salad dressing.
- Choose soft tacos over crunchy tacos.
- Avoid quesadillas which tend to be loaded with cheese and cooked in oil.

### **Healthy Chinese Dining**

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Chinese is the most popular ethnic cuisine in the United States. Chinese menus offer lots of healthy vegetables, lean protein sources and a wide range of foods and flavors. Deep fried selections, high fat sauces, and monosodium glutamate can be pitfalls to the otherwise healthy menu options.

- Learn the language. Choose Jum (poached); Kow (roasted); or steamed.
- Choose vegetable-heavy dishes, with stir fried chicken or shrimp.
- Keep portions small. Order family style and share dishes, getting a taste of it all. Leftovers make a great lunch.
- Choose a spring roll (100 calories) in place of an egg roll (200 calories).
- Avoid battered, deep fried selections. These can top 1400 calories per order.
- Fried rice and lo mein don't seem too greasy when you eat them, but a serving ranges from 1100-1500 calories.
- Ask for your entrée to be stir fried with beef or chicken stock instead of oil.
- Ask for sauces on the side and use sparingly.
- Ask for your dish to be lightly sautéed without MSG.