



## The Pros and Cons (mostly cons) of Fast Food.

Okay, to be fair to all, we'll start by listing the good things about fast food. And as we go through the list, see if you can spot the one very important thing that doesn't make the cut. Here we go...

First of all, fast food is... well... fast. So less time passes between your first pang of hunger, and your first bite of food. Fast food is relatively inexpensive, and who doesn't put a priority on budget these days? Fast food is convenient. In fact at least one fast food outlet is doing a brisk business at just about every main intersection in America. Fast food is popular. Conservative estimates have about a third of all Americans "going fast" at least once a day. Fast food is loved by kids. You might even get that coveted spontaneous hug from the back seat when you make a surprise turn into the local drive-thru. And in the interest of full disclosure, we'll throw in one more. Fast food is, for the most part, delicious.

Now, you probably noticed that nowhere on that list do we see anything resembling "Fast food is good for you." That's because it pretty much isn't. By far, most fast foods tend to be foods and beverages that are very high in fat, calories, and added sugars. Often as not, entire important food groups are nowhere to be found. Neither for that matter are vitamins, minerals, or fiber. Not surprisingly, virtually every reliable medical report on the current obesity epidemic in America lists fast food as a primary contributor.

Take a Happy Meal for example: While your child is happily ingesting a cheeseburger, fries, and small drink, he's sadly ingesting 650 calories, 23 grams of fat, and 890 mg of sodium. Meanwhile he's not getting any of the six servings of fruit and veggies recommended daily. And, no, French fries don't count. About the only thing that doesn't negatively impact your child's diet in a Happy Meal is the free action figure, provided he doesn't accidentally eat it.

Teens and adults don't fare any better with their fast food choices. In fact worse, if you go by the numbers. A Crispy Chicken Sandwich meal with a large fry and soft drink comes in at 1340 calories, 48 grams of fat, and 1440 mg of sodium. Interestingly too, as studies show, fast food doesn't satisfy hunger for very long. You'd think it would with all those calories, wouldn't you?

And we don't mean to just pick on the golden arches here. There's plenty of blame to go around. The same high bad-stuff low good-stuff ratios occur with the taco, chicken-bucket, and sliced-beef sandwich venues as well.

So what can we do about all this? Can we still find ways to enjoy the benefits of fast food, while minimizing all the unhealthy pitfalls? We can, yes, but we have to be diligent food police, and be willing to make some trade-offs in the process. One positive trend in the world of fast food is they are starting to get the message, and offer some healthier choices on their menus. However, the unhealthy stuff is still their bread and butter, so to speak. So the first rule is to never let your guard down. Remain wary of fast food. Learn how to determine exactly what's in it that is potentially bad for you. Then look for ways to improve its nutritional value. Below are some ideas for healthier fast-food eating:

- Get it “to go”. That way you can supplement your meal at home with healthy things like low fat milk, fresh fruit, carrot sticks, and low/sugar, low/fat salad dressing.
- Look at the nutritional information before you order your meal. It will influence your choice toward more healthy options.
- Talk to your children about how their food choices affect their health. They might surprise you and want to make healthier choices on their own. It happens sometimes, believe it or not.
- Limit soft drinks, fries, and fried foods. Replace them with water, some of the new fruit and veggie sides being offered, and broiled or baked options.
- Accept no more than 2 grams of added sugar and choose a good source of protein.
- Evaluate the caloric density before you choose your meal. Caloric density is simply the number of calories a food provides per ounce. So let's say an 8 ounce serving of chicken provides 360 calories. By dividing the ounces (8) into the calories (360), we arrive at the caloric density (45). A healthy caloric density is anything less than 68. Food with high caloric density can cause you to consume more calories than you need.
- Fast food portions are large. Eat half now and half later for a snack.
- Order sandwiches without sauces or mayo. Order salads with low/sugar low/fat dressings. Not a bad idea to carry packets of your own dressing.
- *When evaluating a fast food meal, utilize the individual maximum amount of fat grams per meal information provided on the front page of the Barix Guide to Good Health.*

## **Barix Better Choices**

The following chart provides a breakdown of food choices from fast food restaurants that qualify as Barix Better Choices. To meet this standard a menu item must have a caloric density below 68 (Calories per ounce), have 30% or less of its total calories from fat, and have 2 grams or less of added sugar.

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Food/Beverage	Serving Size (oz)	Calories	Caloric Density	Fat (grams)	Protein (grams)
Subway					
6" ham sandwich	7.5	290	38	5	18
6" chicken breast sandwich	7.9	330	42	5	24
6" roast beef sandwich	7.5	290	38	5	19
6" turkey breast sandwich	7.5	280	37	4.5	18
6" turkey and ham sandwich	7.8	290	37	5	20
6" Subway Club	8.6	320	37	6	24
6" Veggie Delite	5.6	230	41	3	9
Double Meat (DM)					
6" DM turkey breast	9.4	340	36	6	28
6" DM turkey and ham	10.0	360	36	7	31
6" DM ham	10.0	380	38	7	28
6" DM roast beef	9.4	360	38	7	29
6" DM Subway Club	11.6	420	36	8	39
6" DM oven roasted chicken	10.3	430	42	8	39
gr. chicken and spinach salad	10	140	14	3	20
Subway Club Salad	13.7	160	12	4	18
Veggie Delite Salad	10.7	60	6	1	3
McDonald's					
Chicken McGrill, without mayo	6.3	300	48	2.5	27
Caesar salad with gr. chicken	10.6	210	20	6	28
Apple Dippers (without caramel)	2.2	35	16	0	0
1% milk	8	100	13	2.5	8
Minute Maid apple juice	6.8	90	13	0	0
orange juice	12	140	12	0	0
Wendy's					
side salad	5.5	35	6	0	2
fresh fruit cup	5.6	80	14	0	0
baked potato, plain	10	270	27	0	7
baked potato, sour cream & chives	10.4	340	33	6	8
baked potato, broccoli & cheese	13.7	440	32	15	10
chili, small	8	220	28	6	17
grilled chicken filet, only	3.5	120	34	2.5	23
Ultimate Grilled Chicken sandwich	7.5	360	48	7	31

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Burger King					
Chicken Whopper w/o mayo	8.4	410	48	7	38
BF Veggie Burger w/o mayo	6.8	340	50	8	23
side garden salad	3.5	20	6	0	1
Fire Grilled Chicken Garden Salad	11.5	210	18	7	25
Taco Bell					
Fresco Style (FS)					
FS Ranchero Chicken Taco	4.5	170	38	4	12
FS grilled steak soft taco	4.3	170	40	5	11
FS Gordita Baja-Chicken	5.1	230	45	6	15
FS Gordita Baja-Steak	5.1	230	45	7	13
FS bean burrito	7.1	350	49	8	13
FS burrito supreme-chicken	8.0	350	44	8	19
FS burrito supreme-steak	8	350	44	9	17
FS Fiesta Burrito-Chicken	6.6	350	53	9	16
FS tostada	5.9	200	34	6	8
FS Enchirito-Beef	6.7	270	40	9	12
FS Enchirito-Chicken	6.7	250	37	5	17
FS Enchirito-Steak	6.7	250	37	7	14
bean burrito	6.6	370	56	10	14
tostada	5.7	250	44	10	11

Hopefully these suggestions leave you better equipped to deal with the realities of fast food. Remember, healthy eating can be delicious too. So next time fast food finds its way into your dinner plans, make sure you have it your way - the healthy way.

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