

Eating Healthy when Dining Out

People are eating out more than ever. It is easy to eat more calories, sugars, and fat than normal, as well as less healthy. Try these ideas for healthy dining out.

Dining Ideas

Practice eating smaller portions. Take half the meal home (put half into a “to go” box right away). Split it with your friend or order a healthy appetizer as a main course.

Look closely at the descriptions on the menu. Watch for items labeled deep-fried, pan-fried, basted, batter-dipped, breaded, creamy, crispy, or scalloped, Alfredo, au gratin or in cream sauce. These are often high in calories, unhealthy fats or sodium.

Choose healthy side options. Avoid fries and onion rings. Order a side salad, baked potato, steamed vegetables, or a cup of broth-based soup. Even if it doesn't say you can choose a different side, ask your server.

Limit the sauces. There are many hidden calories in mayo, sour cream, salad dressing and other sauces. Ask for sauces to be “on the side” or remove them.

Eat less at noon to save for a special dinner. Don't skip meals, this can lead to overeating later. Eat a small snack, such as an apple, 30 minutes before your meal. It can help you be in better control of your choices.

Buffets and all-you-can-eat specials can cause you to overeat. Scan the whole buffet for healthy options. Make choices before having your plate in your hand.

Have the regular size. It may seem like a good “value” but there are lots of extra calories and fats in those larger portions.

Other Tips

Drink water with your meal. Soda is a huge source of hidden calories. One 32-oz regular cola has about 425 calories. This can quickly take up a big portion of your daily calorie intake. Try to add a little lemon to your water or order unsweetened iced tea.

Avoid croissants, biscuits, potpies, quiches, and pastries. Pick whole-wheat or whole-grain buns, hard rolls, bread sticks (if not brushed with butter), or French bread.

Plan by looking at the menu (and any nutrition information) online. You can find the nutrition facts for many restaurant items online. Make your choices in advance so you are not tempted when you look at the menu.

Special order. Many menu items would be healthy if it were prepared better. Ask for vegetables and main dishes to be served without sauces. Use olive oil and vinegar for salads or order the dressing “on the side.” Spoon only a small amount on at a time. Ask to have your food broiled, baked or steamed.

Take time to enjoy the meal and eat sensibly. Think about what you eat and savor each bite. Chew well and avoid eating on the run. Stop eating before you feel full. It takes time for our bodies to realize that we have eaten. Sensible eating relaxes you, so you digest better, and you feel satisfied.

Count alcohol calories as part of your eating. A mixed drink or 2 to 3 glasses of wine add to the calories when eating out. Alcohol can be a strong trigger to make poorer food choices and eat more than planned.

What to Order

	Better Choice	Go Easy On
<p>Fast Food Fast food is part of our lives. Be aware of what you order and you can end up with a healthy meal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pancakes with sugar free syrup • Yogurt with fruit • Low fat milk • Baked potatoes • Kid size or junior burgers • Grilled chicken (no sauce) • Salad with low fat dressing on the side • Small fries • Frozen yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast sandwiches on biscuits or croissants • Fried chicken or fish sandwiches • Burgers • Large fries, onion rings • Salad dressings, special sauce • Milkshakes, ice cream
<p>Pizza Pizza can be nutritious, it depends on toppings. Whole wheat crust and thin crust are better choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mushrooms, broccoli, onions, peppers, tomatoes, spinach • Canadian bacon, chicken, shrimp • Have your pizza be made with half the cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double crust, deep dish, or stuffed crust • Pepperoni or bacon • Anchovies • Sausage • Extra cheese
<p>Deli Deli sandwiches are often enough for two. Share with a friend or take half home if you can keep it in the fridge. Fill out your meal with a salad or broth-based soup.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain breads or rolls • Pita bread • Tomato, lettuce, onion, peppers • Mustard • Roast chicken or turkey • Baked or boiled ham • Vegetables • Tuna (with light mayo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels • Corned beef, Reuben sandwiches • Salami, bologna, sausage, pastrami • Panini-type sandwiches • Meatballs • Mayonnaise, oil, dressings
<p>Mexican Food The basics of Mexican food-beans, rice, tortillas-are quite healthy. Watch out for added fat in cheese, sour cream, and fried tortillas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salsa • Fajitas • Gazpacho • Black bean soup • Soft tacos, burritos, and enchiladas made with chicken • Beans and rice • Lettuce and tomatoes • Fish dishes (not fried) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chimichangas and fried burritos • Refried beans • Crispy enchiladas, tostados • Nachos • Deluxe combination plates • Fried chips • Guacamole • Sour cream

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<p>Italian Based on vegetables and small portions of meat, Italian food can be great low-fat cuisine. Some restaurants offer whole grain pasta, but it may not be listed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marinara or marsala sauce • Piccata (lemon-wine sauce) • Garden salads • Minestrone soup • Gnocchi and polenta • Risotto • Chicken cacciatore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garlic bread • Oil for dipping bread • Antipasto • Alfredo and cream sauces • Carbonara • Salami, prosciutto
<p>Breakfast Eat a good breakfast, one that is moderate in calories and fat. It will help you have more energy and keep you from overeating the rest of the day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cereal with skim milk • Fresh fruit and string cheese or peanut butter • English muffin or whole wheat toast with peanut butter or low-fat cheese • Poached or scrambled egg (one or two) • Two egg omelets with veggies • Egg substitutes • Yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biscuits and gravy • Corned beef hash • Omelets filled with cheese, sausage, or bacon • Hash browns, breakfast potatoes • Muffins, scones, pastries, coffee cakes
<p>Coffee Houses Coffee shops have become a very popular breakfast option. Keep in mind that coffee drinks can pack several hundred calories, so choose with care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Espresso • Brewed coffee • Cappuccino (made with soy, skim, or 1% milk) • Latte (made with soy, skim, or 1% milk) • Drinks sweetened with sugar free syrups or sugar substitutes (unsweetened is best) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinks made with whole milk or 2% milk • Drinks made with flavoring syrups • Drinks topped with whipped cream • Muffins, scones, Danish, coffee cake • Cookies, brownies
<p>Salad Bar Most ladles of salad dressing are about 1 ounce. This is twice the amount of salad dressing in a serving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettuce (the darker, the better) • Any raw vegetable • Oil-based dressings, such as balsamic vinaigrette • Low fat dressing • Vinegar • Cottage cheese • Garbanzo/kidney beans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheeses • Egg yolks • Macaroni/potato salads • Regular dressing • Croutons, bacon pieces • Olives • Nuts and seeds
<p>Vending Machines Always check the Nutrition Facts for the serving size. There may be many servings in one package.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuts, trail mix • Baked chips, Sun Chips • Goldfish snack crackers • Animal crackers • Light popcorn • Diet soda • Protein bar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candy bars • Pastries • Regular chips • Cookies, sweet rolls • Regular soda • Cheese crackers

Teach Back

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

Who to Call

If you have more questions, contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#203