



Healthy Dining Out

Visit Thirteen

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Making Healthy Choices When You Dine Out

For many people, eating out is a way to relax and socialize. But if you are watching your weight or just are concerned with healthy eating, dining out can be a challenge. The good news is that usually there are healthier options at every restaurant, even at fast-food places.

Guidelines for Dining Out and Ordering Food

By following some simple guidelines, you can enjoy eating out and still have a healthy diet:

- **Plan ahead.**
 - Before you go out to eat, think about where you will eat and what you will select.
 - It will be much easier to make healthy choices if you have already decided what you will order.
 - You may be able to check the menu online before going out.
 - Try not to arrive at the restaurant overly hungry.
 - It is harder to make healthy food choices when you get too hungry.
- **Think about your portions.**
 - Ask for a half-size portion of the meal. Or ask if the restaurant offers lunch-sized portions, which tend to be smaller.
 - At fast-food restaurants, choose the smallest-size meal option instead of “super-sizing.”
 - If you enjoy leftovers, try putting half of your meal in a to-go box.
 - Ask your server to bring the box with your meal, so that you can split the meal before you even take the first bite.
 - Try splitting a meal with someone else at your table.
 - Avoid all-you-can-eat menu options and buffet-style restaurants.
 - Unlimited refills of soup or pasta may sound like a good deal, but they can make it easier to overeat.
- **Make your meals lower in fat.**
 - Before you order, find out how the food is prepared.
- **Foods that are broiled, poached, grilled, baked, or steamed tend to be lower in fat than foods that are fried.**
- **Limit foods that are breaded or that come with cream sauce or gravy.**
 - Ask to have butter, sour cream, sauces, and salad dressing served on the side.
 - This will allow you to control how much you use.
 - Use lemon juice and vinegar instead of salad dressing.
 - Order hamburgers and sandwiches without the high-fat extras, such as the bun, cheese, and bacon.
 - Choose leaner deli meats such as turkey or roast beef rather than salami or bologna.
 - If you want dessert, look for low-fat frozen yogurt, sorbet, fruit ice, or sherbet.
- **Add fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.**
 - Order extra vegetables on pizzas and sandwiches.



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- Substitute vegetables for a baked potato or french fries.
 - At fast-food restaurants, ask if you can have a salad or fruit instead of french fries.
- Try vegetarian menu options.
 - Ethnic restaurants, such as Indian, Thai, or Japanese restaurants, often have a wide variety of vegetarian choices.
- Ask for brown rice and whole-grain pasta instead of white rice and pasta.
 - Pick whole-grain bread and tortillas.
- **Choose your beverages carefully.**
 - Drink water instead of sugar-sweetened soft drinks.
 - If you don't like plain water, try other sugar-free or low-calorie beverages, such as fruit-flavored sparkling water or unsweetened iced tea.
 - Remember that alcoholic drinks can have a lot of calories.
 - A large cocktail, such as a margarita, can have as many calories as your main course.
- **Manage carbohydrates.**
 - Learn to estimate the serving sizes of foods that have carbohydrate.
 - If you measure food at home, it will be easier to estimate the amount in a serving of restaurant food.
 - If the meal you order has too much carbohydrate (such as potatoes, corn, or baked beans), ask to have a low-carbohydrate food instead
 - Ask for a salad or non-starchy vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, or peppers.
 - Skip the bread they bring to the table before your meal.
 - Eating a lot of bread or breadsticks will fill you up before your meal and not leave enough room for fruits and vegetables.
 - In addition to the carbohydrates, the calories add up when you add butter, margarine, or olive oil to bread.
 - If you eat more carbohydrate at a meal than you had planned, take a walk or do other exercise. This will help lower your blood sugar.

Reading the Menu with Health in Mind

Menu Words to Know

Some words on the menu can help you pick healthier meals.

X Watch Out for These Words (Higher in Fat and Calories)

These words often mean the food has more fat, cream, or oil:

- Alfredo
- Au gratin
- Battered
- Breaded
- Butter sauce
- Casserole
- Cheese sauce
- Cream sauce
- Creamed
- Crispy
- Fried or deep fried
- Gravy
- Hollandaise
- Marinated (in oil)
- Pastry crust
- Pot pie

✓ Look for These Words (Healthier Choices)




These words usually mean the food is lower in fat and calories:

- Baked
- Boiled (in water, wine, or lemon juice)
- Broiled
- Grilled
- Lightly sautéed
- Poached
- Roasted
- Steamed or au jus (cooked in its own juice)

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Ask for Healthy Swaps

Most places will help you make healthy choices when you dine out or order food. Feel free to ask questions. This will help you make changes or swaps to your food. Here are some ideas for healthy swaps:

 Healthy Swap	 Less Healthy Option	 Healthier Option
Cooking Oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter • Lard • Palm oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive oil • Canola oil • Avocado oil
Meat or Poultry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatty cuts of meat • Skin-on chicken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trimmed meat • Skinless chicken
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole milk • Cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fat-free milk • Skim milk
Salad Dressing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creamy dressings • Dressing poured on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vinaigrette dressings • Dressing on the side
Sauces and Toppings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter • Gravy • Creamy sauces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No sauce • Sauce on the side

Menu Item Ideas

Use these simple suggestions to make you order healthy choices when ordering breakfast, lunch, dinner, or dessert.

Breakfast

- Decaf tea or coffee with fat-free or skim milk
- Fresh fruit or 4 ounces of 100% fruit juice
- Whole-grain bread, bagel, or English muffin with jelly or honey
- Whole-grain cereal with fat-free or skim milk
- Omelet made with egg whites or egg substitute
- Multigrain pancakes with fresh fruit
- High-protein, fat-free yogurt (try adding cereal or fresh fruit)

Beverages

- Water with lemon
- Flavored sparkling water

- Juice spritzer (half fruit juice and half sparkling water)
- Unsweetened iced tea
- Tomato juice (reduced sodium)
- Fat-free or low-fat or skim milk

Appetizer

- Broth-based soups
- Steamed seafood
- Shrimp cocktail
 - Limit cocktail sauce – it is high in sodium
- Melons or fresh fruit
- Bean soups
- Salad with dressing on the side
 - Or add lemon juice or vinegar

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Main Meal

- Poultry
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Vegetable dishes

Side Dishes

- Vegetables
- Whole-grain side dishes
- Ask for side dishes without butter or margarine
 - Try mustard, salsa, or low-fat yogurt instead of sour cream or butter

Desserts

- Fresh fruit
- Fat-free frozen yogurt
- Sherbert
- Fruit sorbet
- Try sharing a dessert

Healthy Choices by Restaurant Type

Most restaurants offer healthy choices. You just need to know what to look for. This section gives you better options at different types of restaurants.

Chinese

- Chicken with Broccoli
 - Ask for steamed (zhēng) or lightly stir-fried (chǎo) with mild sauce
 - Ask for chicken without skin and low-sodium soy sauce
- Shrimp with Mixed Vegetables
 - Pick steamed (zhēng) or poached (shuǐ zhǔ) shrimp
- Moo Shu Chicken or Moo Shu Vegetables
 - Ask for less sauce or if there is a low-sodium version
 - Skip the pancakes or only eat one
- Beef with Snow Peas or Broccoli
 - Ask for lean beef, lightly stir-fried (chǎo)
 - Ask for low-sodium soy sauce
- Steamed Fish Fillet with Ginger and Scallions
 - Choose fresh fish that is steamed (zhēng)

Deli or Sandwich Shop

- Vegetable Pita
 - Fresh sliced vegetables
 - Order whole-wheat pita bread
 - Use a low-fat dressing, yogurt, or mustard
- Bean Soup
 - Like a lentil or minestrone soup
- Turkey Breast Sandwich
 - With mustard, lettuce, and tomato
- Fresh Fruit

Fast Food

- Grilled Chicken Breast Sandwich
 - No mayonnaise
- Single Hamburger
 - No cheese
- Garden Salad
 - With dressing on the side
- Grilled Chicken Salad
 - Made with reduced-fat dressing
- Yogurt
 - Ask for low-fat or fat-free

French

- Fresh Fish
 - Grilled (grillé), baked (au four), or broiled (gratiné)
 - Without heavy sauces
 - Ask for lemon or herbs to flavor (avec citron ou herbes)
- Shrimp
 - Served without a creamy or buttery sauce
- Scallops
 - Lightly cooked (à peine cuit)
 - Served plain (nature) or with simple seasonings
- Steamed (À la vapeur) Mussels
 - Served in broth (en bouillon)
 - Skip the cream-based versions
- Dinner Salad with Seafood
 - Ask for grilled fish or shrimp
 - Ask for lemon juice and vinegar instead of creamy dressing

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 **Indian**

- Tandoori Chicken or Chicken Tikka
 - Grilled in a clay oven (tandoor), not fried
 - Served without cream sauces
 - Ask for extra spices for more flavor
- Dal (Lentils)
 - Cooked in light oil or ghee
 - Avoid heavy cream or butter
- Mixed Vegetable Curry
 - Ask for it to be made with tomato base, not cream
 - Choose dishes with spinach, cauliflower, or okra
 - Served with brown rice or whole wheat roti
- Grilled or Steamed dish
 - Ask for fish cooked with herbs and spices
 - Avoid fried or creamy fish dishes
 - Served with lemon and fresh vegetables
- Cucumber and Tomato Salad (Kachumber)
 - Fresh, raw vegetables
 - Ask for lemon juice instead of dressing

 **Italian**

- Minestrone Soup
 - Skip putting any cheese on top
- Grilled Fish or Vegetables
 - Make sure the fish is grilled (alla griglia), not fried
 - Do not order any creamy sides
- Mussels in Light Wine or Tomato Sauce
 - Ask for steamed (al vapore) mussels, not fried
 - Make sure the wine or tomato sauce is made without butter or cream
- Grilled Eggplant
 - Make sure it is grilled (alla griglia), not fried
- Chicken Piccata
 - Ask for grilled (alla griglia) chicken with no breading
 - Ask for less sauce or for sauce on the side
 - Ask for vegetables instead of pasta

 **Japanese**

- Grilled Chicken, Fish, or Shrimp Teriyaki
 - Choose grilled (yakimono), not fried

- Ask if it can be broiled (teriyaki) in sauce
- Salad
 - Choose light dressings like dinger or miso
- Soba Noodles
 - These are often used in soups
 - Avoid fried noodle dishes or heavy sauce
- Hot Pot Soup or Stew (Nebemono)
 - Look for versions with tofu, vegetables, and lean proteins
 - Avoid fatty cuts of meat or rich broths
- Tofu or Grilled Vegetables
 - Ask for tofu to be steamed (mushi) or grilled (yakimomo), not fried
 - Choose vegetables grilled (yakimomo), not tempura

 **Mexican**

- Shredded (Deshebrado) Chicken
 - Try dishes that are grilled (a la parrilla or asado) or simmered (guisado) with spices
- Rice and Black Beans
 - Ask for brown rice
- Served with Salsa or Salsa Verde (Servido con Salsa)
 - Choose salsas instead of creamy or cheesy sauces
- Dishes Topped with Shredded Lettuce, Diced Tomatoes, and Onions
 - Ask for extra vegetables
- Corn (Tortilla de Maíz) or Whole-Wheat Flour Tortillas (Tortilla de Trigo Integral)
 - Avoid fried shells like taco bowls or chimichangas
 - Soft tortillas (tortilla suave) are a lighter choice

 **Middle Eastern**

- Grilled Kebabs (Chicken or Beef)
 - Grilled without added fat (Mashwī ‘alā al-faḥm bidūn duhūn)
 - Marinated with herbs and spices (Mutabbal bil-a’shāb wa al-tawābil)
- Falafel or Hummus Plate
 - Made from mashed chickpeas or fava beans
 - Served with fresh veggies and lemon juice
- Baba Ghanoush

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- Ask for with cucumbers or tomatoes for dipping
- Stuffed Vegetables (like Grape Leaves or Peppers)
 - Baked or charbroiled instead of fried (Makhbūz aw mashwī badalan min maqlī)
 - Filled with rice and spices
- Couscous or Bulgur Salad (like Tabbouleh)
 - Mixed with parsley, tomatoes, onions, and lemon dressing

Steakhouses

- Lean Broiled Beef
 - No more than 6 ounces
 - Try London broil, filet mignon, and round or flank steaks
- Baked Potato
 - Do not order butter, margarine, or sour cream
 - Ask for low-fat yogurt or mustard
- Green Salad
 - Order lemon juice and vinegar instead of a creamy dressing
 - Lemon juice and herbs is also good for salad dressing
- Steamed Vegetables
 - Do not add butter or margarine
 - Try lemon juice and herbs for more flavor

- Seafood Dishes (“Surf”)
 - Do not add butter or margarine
 - Ask for grilled or broiled, not fried



Thai

- Grilled (ย่างyang), Steamed (นึ่งneung), or Sautéed Dishes
 - Look for barbecued, sautéed, broiled, boiled, steamed, braised, or marinated options
 - Choose charbroiled items over fried
- Vegetable Dishes
 - Try dishes that are served with many vegetables
- Basil-Based Sauces
 - Try dishes with basal sauce, sweet basil, or fresh basil leaves
- Lime-Based Sauces
 - Lime sauce or lime juice is light and not heavy
- Spicy Sauces
 - Use chili sauce or fried chili flakes for flavor
 - Ask for Thai spices and hot sauce for bold flavor

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