

Aim for a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a Healthy Weight On the Go

A Pocket Guide



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



Dining Out/Take-Out: How To Choose

General Tips for Healthy Dining Out and Take-Out

Whether you're trying to maintain weight or lose weight, you can eat healthfully when dining out or bringing food in, if you know how. The following tips will help you move toward healthier eating as you limit your calories, as well as total fat, saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and sodium (salt) when eating prepared foods.

You Are the Customer

- Ask for what you want. Most restaurants will honor your requests.
- Ask questions. Don't be intimidated by the menu—your server will be able to tell you how foods are prepared or suggest substitutions on the menu.
- To reduce portion sizes, try ordering a low-fat appetizer as your main meal, or share an entree with a friend or family member.
- Avoid all-you-can-eat buffets.
- Review the menu online, if possible, and choose the

healthiest option before you go to the restaurant.

- General tips: Limiting your calories and fat can be easy as long as you know what to order. Try asking these questions when you call ahead or before you order. Ask the restaurant whether they would, upon request, do the following:
 - Serve fat-free (skim) milk rather than whole milk or cream
 - Reveal the type of cooking oil used
 - Trim visible fat off poultry or meat
 - Leave butter, gravy, or cream sauces off the side dish or entree
 - Serve salad dressing on the side
 - Accommodate special requests if made in advance by telephone or in person

Above all, don't get discouraged. Most restaurants usually have several healthy options to choose from.

Reading the Menu

Choose lower calorie, low-fat cooking methods. Look for terms such as:

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

Be aware of foods high in calories, total fat, and saturated fat. Watch out for terms such as:

- Alfredo
- Au fromage
- Au gratin
- Basted
- Béarnaise
- Breaded
- Butter sauce
- Casserole
- Cheese sauce
- Creamed
- In cream or cream sauce
- Crispy
- Deep fried
- Escaloped

- Fried
- Gravy
- Hollandaise
- Marinated (in oil)
- Pastry crust
- Pot pie

Specific Tips for Healthy Choices

Breakfasts

- Decaf tea or coffee with fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk
- Fresh fruit or small glass of 100 percent fruit juice
- Whole-grain bread, bagel, or English muffin with jelly or honey
- Whole-grain cereal with fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk
- Oatmeal with fat-free milk topped with fruit
- Omelet made with egg whites or egg substitute
- Multigrain pancakes with fresh fruit or apple butter
- Fat-free yogurt (try adding cereal or fresh fruit)

Beverages

- Water with lemon
- Flavored sparkling water (noncaloric)

- Juice spritzer (half fruit juice and half sparkling water)
- Unsweetened iced tea
- Tomato juice (reduced sodium)
- Fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk

Breads

While many yeast breads and breadsticks are low in calories and low in fat, the calories add up when you add butter, margarine, or olive oil to the bread. Also, eating a lot of bread in addition to your meal will fill you up with unwanted calories and not leave enough room for fruits and vegetables.

Appetizers

- Broth-based soups
- Steamed seafood
- Shrimp* cocktail (limit cocktail sauce—it's high in sodium)
- Melons or fresh fruit
- Bean soups
- Salad with reduced-fat dressing (or add lemon juice or vinegar)

Entrees

- Poultry, fish, shellfish, and vegetable dishes
- Pasta with red sauce or with vegetables (primavera)

- Look for terms such as “baked,” “broiled,” “steamed,” “poached,” “lightly sauteed,” or “lightly stir-fried”
- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side
- Limit the amount of butter, margarine, and salt you use at the table

Salads/Salad Bars

- Lettuce, spinach, and other fresh greens
- Fresh vegetables—tomatoes, mushrooms, carrots, cucumbers, peppers, onions, radishes, and broccoli
- Chickpeas, kidney beans, and other beans
- Skip the nonvegetable choices: deli meats, bacon, egg, cheese, and croutons
- Choose lower calorie, reduced-fat, or fat-free dressing; lemon juice; or vinegar

Side Dishes

- Vegetables and whole-grain side dishes (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, etc.) make good additions to meals and also can be combined for a lower calorie alternative to higher calorie entrees

* If you are on a cholesterol-lowering diet, eat shrimp in moderation.

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

Desserts and Coffees

- Fresh fruit
- Fat-free frozen yogurt
- Sherbet or fruit sorbet (these are usually fat free, but check the calorie content)
- Try sharing a dessert
- Ask for fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk for your coffee (instead of cream or half-n-half)

Tips for Healthy Eating On the Go

If you're dining out or bringing food in, it's easy to find healthy foods. Knowing about typical American dishes, as well as other ethnic cuisines, can help make your dining experience healthy and enjoyable. The following list includes healthy food choices (lower in calories and fat) and terms to look for when making your on-the-go selections.

Supermarket

Choose More Often . . .

Bringing prepared food home from the supermarket is growing in

popularity. Supermarkets often provide a wide selection of foods from various cuisines. Use the suggestions in each of these categories to guide your decision. One thing to keep in mind is portion size. Take-out portions can be just as large as restaurant portions. For more information on portion sizes, refer to Portion Distortion at www.nhlbi.nih.gov.

Chinese

Choose More Often . . .

- Zheng (steamed)
- Gun (boiled)
- Kao (roasted)
- Shao (barbecue)
- Poached
- Lightly stir-fried in mild sauce
- Cooked in light wine sauce
- Hot and spicy tomato sauce
- Sweet and sour sauce
- Hot mustard sauce
- Reduced-sodium soy sauce
- Dishes without MSG added
- Spinach or broccoli
- Fresh fish fillets, shrimp, scallops
- Chicken without skin
- Lean beef
- Bean curd (tofu)

- Moo shu vegetables, chicken, or shrimp
- Steamed rice
- Lychee fruit
- Hoison sauce* with assorted Chinese vegetables: broccoli, mushrooms, onions, cabbage, snow peas, scallions, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, asparagus
- Oyster sauce* (made from seafood)

French

Choose More Often . . .

- Dinner salad with vinegar or lemon juice (or a reduced-fat dressing)
- Crusty bread without butter
- Fresh fish, shrimp, scallops, steamed mussels (without sauces)
- Chicken without skin
- Rice and noodles without cream or added butter or other fat
- Fresh fruit for dessert

Italian

Choose More Often . . .

- Lightly sauteed with onions
- Shallots
- Peppers and mushrooms
- Artichoke hearts

- Sun-dried tomatoes
- Red sauces—spicy marinara sauce (arrabiata), marinara sauce, or cacciatore
- Light red sauce or light red or white wine sauce
- Light mushroom sauce
- Red clam sauce
- Primavera (no cream sauce)
- Lemon sauce
- Capers
- Herbs and spices—garlic and oregano
- Crushed tomatoes and spices
- Florentine (spinach)
- Grilled (often fish or vegetables)
- Piccata (lemon)
- Manzanne (eggplant)

Middle Eastern

Choose More Often . . .

- Lemon dressing, lemon juice
- Blended or seasoned with Middle Eastern spices
- Herbs and spices (parsley, rosemary, basil, dill, etc.)
- Mashed chickpeas
- Fava beans
- Smoked eggplant

* Hoison and oyster sauces are high in sodium (salt). Choose versions that are lower in sodium, or limit the quantity, particularly if on a low-sodium diet.

- Tomatoes, mushrooms, green peppers, and cucumbers
- Spiced ground meat
- Special garlic sauce
- Basted with tomato sauce
- Garlic
- Chopped parsley and/or onion
- Couscous (grain)
- Rice or bulgur (cracked wheat)
- Stuffed with rice and imported spices
- Grilled on a skewer
- Marinated and barbecued
- Baked
- Charbroiled or charcoal broiled
- Fresh fruit for dessert

Japanese

Choose More Often . . .

- House salad with fresh ginger and cellophane (clear rice) noodles
- Rice
- Nabemono (soup/stew)
- Chicken, fish, or shrimp teriyaki, broiled in sauce
- Soba noodles, often used in soups
- Yakimono (broiled)
- Tofu (or bean curd)
- Grilled vegetables

Indian

Choose More Often . . .

- Tikka (pan roasted)
- Cooked with or marinated in yogurt
- Cooked with green vegetables, onions, tomatoes, peppers, and mushrooms
- With spinach (saag)
- Baked leavened breads
- Masala
- Tandoori
- Paneer
- Cooked with curry, marinated in spices
- Lentils, chickpeas (garbanzo beans)
- Garnished with dried fruits
- Chickpeas (garbanzo) and potatoes
- Basmati rice (pullao)
- Matta (peas)
- Chicken or shrimp kebab

Mexican

Choose More Often . . .

- Shredded spicy chicken
- Rice and black beans
- Rice (particularly brown rice)

- Served with salsa (hot red tomato sauce)
- Served with salsa verde (green chili sauce)
- Covered with enchilada sauce
- Topped with shredded lettuce, diced tomatoes, and onions
- Served with or wrapped in a corn or whole-wheat flour (soft) tortilla
- Grilled
- Marinated
- Picante sauce
- Simmered with vegetarian chili or tomato sauce

Thai

Choose More Often . . .

- Barbecued, sauteed, broiled, boiled, steamed, braised, or marinated
- Charbroiled
- Basil sauce, basil, sweet basil, or basil leaves
- Lime sauce or lime juice
- Chili sauce or crushed dried chili flakes
- Thai spices
- Served in hollowed-out pineapple
- Fish sauce
- Hot sauce

- Napa, bamboo shoots, black mushrooms, ginger, garlic
- Bed of mixed vegetables
- Scallions, onions

Steakhouses

Choose More Often . . .

- Lean broiled beef (no more than 6 ounces)—London broil, filet mignon, round and flank steaks
- Baked potato without added butter, margarine, or sour cream (try low-fat yogurt or mustard)
- Green salad with vinegar or lemon juice (or a reduced-fat dressing)
- Steamed vegetables without added butter or margarine (try lemon juice and herbs)
- Seafood dishes (usually indicated as “surf” on menus)

Fast Food

Choose More Often . . .

- Grilled chicken breast sandwich without mayonnaise
- Single hamburger without cheese
- Grilled chicken salad with reduced-fat dressing
- Garden salad with vinegar or lemon juice (or a reduced-fat dressing)

- Low-fat or fat-free yogurt
- Fat-free muffin or cereal with fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk

Deli/Sandwich Shops

Choose More Often . . .

- Fresh sliced vegetables in whole-wheat pita bread with low-fat dressing, yogurt, or mustard
- Bean soup (lentil, minestrone)
- Turkey breast sandwich with mustard, lettuce, and tomato
- Fresh fruit

Saving Money While Eating Out

Another expense of eating out is its effect on your budget. Try these tips

for making healthy choices eating out without overspending:

- To reduce costs, start by eating out one less time per week.
- Many restaurants provide portions that are large enough to make two meals out of one entree. Bring half of your meal home for the next day, or if dining with a friend or family member, order one entree to share.
- If you often meet a friend or colleague for lunch at a restaurant, try bringing your lunch instead and meeting outside in the park when the weather permits.





Foods in the Fast Lane

When you eat on the go, you don't have to give up eating fast foods completely. You can eat right and still eat fast foods if you select carefully. Here are some tips on fast foods to choose:

- Order from the dollar or value menu; the portions are often smaller than the regular size.
- Order a small hamburger instead of a larger one. Try ordering a hamburger without cheese and extra sauce.
- Order roast beef for a leaner choice than most burgers.
- Order a baked potato instead of french fries. Be careful of high-fat toppings like sour cream, butter, or cheese.
- Order grilled, broiled, or baked fish or chicken.
- Order fat-free or low-fat milk instead of a milkshake. Or try the low-fat frozen yogurt or low-fat milkshake.
- Order salad. Use vinegar and oil or a low-calorie dressing.
- Create a salad at the salad bar. Choose any raw vegetables, fruits, or beans. Limit toppings high in saturated fat, such as cheese, fried noodles, and bacon bits, as well as salads made with mayonnaise. Also, limit salad dressings high in saturated fat and cholesterol.
- For sandwiches, try whole-wheat bread topped with lettuce, tomato, onion, mustard, and ketchup instead of toppings high in saturated fat, such as cheese, bacon, special sauces, or butter.
- Order thin-crust pizza with vegetable toppings such as peppers, mushrooms, or onions instead of extra cheese, pepperoni, and sausage.

Fast Food Choices

Let's see how small changes can add up to big changes with the following sample fast-food meal:

Typical Meal		Lower Fat Choice	
Cheeseburger (313 calories)		Hamburger (265 calories)	
Large french fries (487 calories)		½ small french fries (112 calories)	
12-ounce cola (136 calories)		12-ounce cola (136 calories)	
½ cup vanilla ice cream (137 calories)		Low-fat ice cream cone (146 calories)	
Total saturated fat (g)	13	Total saturated fat (g)	6
Total dietary cholesterol (mg)	71	Total dietary cholesterol (mg)	42
Total fat (g)	46	Total fat (g)	20
Total calories	1,073	Total calories	659

Source: Adapted from National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2005). *Aim for a Healthy Weight* (NIH Publication No. 05-5213), p. 24. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

