

THE FACTS

Roughly 58 percent of Americans dine out at least once a week.

It's not surprising the calories can add up fast! By the end of 2015 many restaurants will have to post nutritional information on their menus but until then.. some help for choosing the healthiest options when you go out to eat.

The worst thing you can do when you go out to dinner is 'wing it.' You need a plan! Not having one will result in bad choices. Use this reference guide to get you in the right frame of mind so that you can enjoy your night out and not pay the price later.

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW

Ordering first can help you make better choices. You won't feel the pressure of listening to everyone else order.

Sitting in a well-lit area near the front of the restaurant may help you make healthier choices. One study shows people who sit in the back eat more calories. Those who ate the least sat near a window at elevated tables.

When in doubt think of someone you know who makes healthy choices. Then, just before you order, ask yourself what they would get.

Look to the middle right hand side of the menu. That's often where you'll find the healthier fare.

Brian Wansink, author of the new book Slim By Design says restaurant menus are designed to highlight fat-filled foods. Because people typically read menus in a Z pattern, the items along this line are often the ones restaurants think you want.

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HEALTHY
DINING OUT TIPS

Starting Off

If you want a piece of bread or two while you are waiting to order, use butter instead of dipping it in olive oil. One study shows people given olive oil consumed 19 percent more calories of fat per piece than those given butter. If ordering a dip, use carrots or peppers instead of chips or pita toasts. A soup with a clear broth is typically a safer option.

Always order water first.

Having wine or cocktails? Skip the margarita and choose a glass of wine or patron, club soda and 3 limes (which has the lowest acidic content for an alcoholic drink).

Skip the soda

Sugary drinks are waste of calories.

Even a small coke adds 140 calories and nearly 10 teaspoons of sugar to your meal. For a healthier option, choose water, or unsweetened tea.

Dress Your Salad

Dressings are often filled with added sugars. Your best option is EVOO with balsamic or fresh lemon. If you want another kind of dressing, order it on the side.

Opt for the “Color”

Meal choices with the words Alfredo, a la crème, au gratin, or described as “creamy” will likely be smothered in a heavy, artificially enhanced sauce. On the other hand, foods that reflect the colors of the rainbow are usually a healthier choice. Many kid’s meals end up as a plate of “beige”, all starch, breads, and sauces. Picking a colorful fruit or veggie salad will automatically up the nutritional content of your meal.

Warning Words

The words used to describe the meal often signal a warning you are about to consume extra calories. Avoid words like breaded, fried, tempura. One study showed that items labeled ‘crispy’ have, on average, 130 more calories. On the flip side, entrees described as ‘marinated’ had 60 fewer calories than their unmarinated counterparts.

Make Substitutions

Don’t be afraid to speak up about the ingredients or preparation of your food if it will make it healthier. Ask for veggies instead of fries. Order your burger wrapped in lettuce instead of on a bun. The extent to which servers will go to make you happy might surprise you.

Order Up

Choose protein over carbs like pasta, bread and rice.

A healthy portion of lean meat is about the size of a standard deck of cards. Stick to servings of rice or pasta that are about the size of a computer mouse.

When ordering fish, always ask if it was farm raised or wild. You want wild.

The best poultry or meat is from a local farm, grass-fed, no antibiotics.

Portions at restaurants are often double the recommended size. Ask for a to-go box and put half away before you even start eating.

Spice it up

Spicy foods with cayenne, chipotle, jalapeno and other kinds of peppers can boost metabolism and reduce your appetite slightly. They can also reduce your craving for salt and sugar.

Condiment Concern

Request salsa or mustard, instead of mayonnaise or ketchup, which is often full of sugar. Ask for less cheese, sour cream, and guacamole. Cutting the amount is a quick way to slash calories without losing the flavor. Request sauce on the side.