

## Eating Out: Finding Healthier Choices



For today's busy families, eating out is a chance for parents to take time off from meal planning, cooking, and cleaning. But finding a place that's kid-friendly and serves nutritious foods can be difficult. You can eat out and eat healthy, too. Many restaurants offer delicious meals that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. That's good news because a diet high in saturated and trans fat can raise blood cholesterol. High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. At home, try to replace the saturated and trans fats in your food with more healthful unsaturated oils like canola, olive, and corn oil. When eating out, ask which type of fat the restaurant uses. At the table, request soft and trans-fat-free margarine.

### Here are some tips for your family to eat healthier when you're out:

- **Look out for the extras.** Kids' menus often offer a free soda or dessert with every entrée. This can add hundreds of calories without adding any nutrition to the meal. Ask for a substitution like water or milk for the soda or fruit instead of the standard dessert.
- **Ask for a different side dish.** While many chain restaurants do not list any side dish other than french fries, most will allow you to substitute something healthier, like cooked vegetables, sliced tomatoes, or a side salad if you ask.
- **Think outside the kids' section.** Adult menus almost universally offer healthy options. Consider sharing an entrée like grilled chicken or fish with your child, or ask about ordering a half portion or lunch portion. Give your children a few choices and have them pick one. This gives them independence while teaching them examples of healthy foods.
- **Explore the salad bar.** Your kids will love the colorful options of all-you-can-eat salad bars. Let them build their own salads with lots of vegetables and fruits; just limit high-fat toppings like cheese, fried noodles, and bacon bits. Keep creamy dressings to a minimum, and ask that dressings on pre-made salads be on the side.
- **Order water or low-fat or skim milk as your beverage.** (For children under age two, stick with whole milk.) Avoid sweetened soft drinks, which are full of sugar.
- **Avoid high-fat condiments** such as sour cream, mayonnaise, tartar sauce, and butter. Ask for low-fat versions if you have to have them.
- **Try to limit eating out** to twice a week, and when you do eat out, choose restaurants that you know have healthy choices.

- **Watch the portion size.** Help control your weight by asking for smaller portions or sharing entrees. Split a large entree with another family member. You'll save dollars and calories. Try to avoid all-you-can-eat buffets as you are more likely to eat more food than you need.

### **A guide from the American Heart Association for choosing healthy meals away from home:**

- Look for steamed, broiled, baked, grilled, poached, or roasted foods. Limit fried, au gratin, crispy, escalloped, pan-fried, sautéed, or stuffed foods high in fat and calories. Instead, if you're not sure about a certain dish, ask your server how it's prepared.
- Choose dishes low in saturated fat and cholesterol. You may still be able to get a healthy meal because many restaurants will prepare foods to order, such as asking for the chicken to be broiled, not fried. If you're not sure about a particular restaurant, phone before you go.
- Eliminate high-sodium foods, which include those that are pickled, in cocktail sauce, smoked, in broth, or au jus. Also limit those in soy or teriyaki sauce.
- Avoid dishes with lots of cheese, sour cream, and mayonnaise. Instead of fried oysters, fish, or chicken, choose boiled spiced shrimp, or baked, boiled, or grilled fish or chicken.
- Choose bread or pita pockets over croissants to reduce fat.
- Salads make great meals, but be careful of the dressing.

#### **References:**

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