Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

BEYOND THE TABLE
2024 NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH®

Healthy Eating on the Run: A Month of Tips

You may eat out a lot – many Americans do. People are looking for fast, easy and good-tasting foods to fit a busy lifestyle. Whether it's carry-out, food court, office cafeteria or sit-down restaurant, there are smart choices everywhere. Here are 31 tips to help you eat healthy when ordering out.

1. Think ahead and plan where you will eat. Consider what meal options are available. Look for places with a wide range of menu items.
2. Take time to look over the menu and make careful selections. Some restaurant menus may have a special section for "healthier" choices.
3. Review and compare nutrition information if it's available. Menu terms that may indicate an item is healthier include: baked, braised, broiled, grilled, poached, roasted, and steamed.
4. Menu terms that usually mean a food is higher in saturated fat and calories include: batter-fried, pan-fried, buttered, creamed, crispy, breaded. Choose these foods only occasionally and in small portions.
5. Think about your food choices for the entire day. If you're planning a special restaurant meal in the evening, have a light breakfast and lunch.
6. Hold the bread or chips until your meal is served. Hunger may drive you to fill up on these foods before your meal arrives.
7. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. No more than one drink for women and two for men. Alcohol tends to increase your appetite and provides calories without any nutrients.
8. Order the regular or child-size portion. Mega-sized servings are probably more than you need. For a lighter meal, order an appetizer in place of a main course.
9. Begin with soup or salad as a way to include more vegetables at mealtime. Follow up with a light main course.
10. Or choose a salad with grilled chicken or seafood as your main course.
11. It's OK to make special requests, just keep them simple. For example, ask for a baked potato or side salad in place of French fries; no mayonnaise or bacon on your sandwich; sauces served on the side.
12. Ask for sauces, dressings and toppings to be served "on the side." Then you control how much you eat
13. Split your order. Share an extra large sandwich or main course with a friend or take half home for another meal (some restaurants may not permit this or will charge for an extra plate).

14. Refrigerate carry-out or leftovers if the food won't be eaten right away. Toss foods kept at room temperature for more than two hours (one hour if warmer than 90 degrees).

15. All-you-can-eat specials, buffets and unlimited salad bars make it difficult to follow recommended serving sizes. Pass these up if you find it difficult to listen to your hunger cues.

16. If you do choose the buffet, fill up on salads and vegetables first. Use small plates, to encourage smaller portions, and limit your trips up to the buffet line.

17. At the salad bar, pile on the dark leafy greens, carrots, peppers and other fresh vegetables. Lighten up on mayonnaise-based salads and high-fat toppings. Enjoy fresh fruit as your dessert.

18. Load up your pizza with vegetable toppings. If you add meat, make it lean ham, Canadian bacon, chicken or shrimp.

19. Enjoy a variety of healthful foods from different cultures. Focus on dishes that emphasize vegetables and lean meats, seafood or beans.

20. Tempted by sweet, creamy desserts? Order a small portion or ask if it can be divided and shared with everyone at the table.

21. At the sandwich shop, choose lean beef, ham, turkey or chicken on whole grain bread. Ask for mustard, ketchup, salsa or low-fat spreads. And, don't forget the veggies.

22. Boost the nutrition in all types of sandwiches by adding tomato, lettuce, peppers or other vegetables.

23. Look for a sandwich wrap in a soft tortilla. Fillings such as rice mixed with seafood, chicken, or grilled vegetables can be healthier options.

24. In place of fries or chips, choose a side salad, fruit or baked potato. Or, share a regular order of fries with a friend.

25. Build a better breakfast sandwich: replace bacon or sausage with Canadian bacon or ham and order your sandwich on a whole grain English muffin or bagel.

26. Be size-wise about muffins, bagels, croissants and biscuits. A jumbo muffin has more than twice the calories of the regular size.

27. Try a smoothie made with 100% juice, fruit and low-fat yogurt for a light meal or snack.

28. For desk-top dining, keep single-serve packages of whole grain crackers, fruit, peanut butter, soup, or tuna around for a quick lunch.

29. Food items on your desk, like nuts or candy bowls, can lead to mindless eating. Keep all snacks and other food items in your desk to avoid the temptation to eat when you're not hungry.

30. Grabbing dinner at the supermarket deli? Select rotisserie chicken, salad-in-a-bag and freshly baked bread. Or, try sliced lean roast beef, onion rolls, salad and fresh fruit.

31. Always eating on the go? Tuck portable, nonperishable foods in your purse, tote, briefcase or backpack for an on-the-run meal. Some suggestions are peanut butter and crackers, granola bars, a piece of fresh fruit, trail mix, single serve packages of whole grain cereal.

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information, visit eatright.org.

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The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

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Source: Finding Your Way to a Healthier You, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U. S. Department of Agriculture.
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