

Eating Well While Eating Out

Why Does it Matter?

It's easy to be tempted when you're eating away from home — especially if everyone around you is chowing down on unhealthy options.

But eating too much fast food or always choosing high-fat, high-calorie menu items can drag a person's body down. The most obvious problem is weight gain. But because the food we eat affects how our bodies function, eating the right (or wrong) foods can influence any number of things:

- mental functioning
- emotional well-being
- energy
- strength
- weight
- future health

Eating on the Go

It's easier than you think to make good choices at a fast-food restaurant, the mall, or even the school cafeteria. Most cafeterias and fast-food places offer healthy choices that are also tasty, like grilled chicken or salads. Be mindful of portion sizes and high fat add-ons, like dressings, sauces or cheese.

Here are some pointers to remember that can help you make wise choices when eating out:

- **Go for balance.** Choose meals that contain a balance of lean proteins (like fish, chicken, or beans if you're a vegetarian), fruits and vegetables (fries and potato chips don't qualify as veggies!), and whole grains (like whole-wheat bread and brown rice). That's why a turkey sandwich on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato is a better choice than a cheeseburger on a white bun.
- **Watch portion sizes.** The portion sizes of American foods have increased over the past few decades so that we are now eating way more than we need. The average size of a hamburger in the 1950s was just 1.5 ounces, compared with today's hamburgers, which weigh in at 8 ounces or more.
- **Drink water or low-fat milk.** Regular sodas, juices, and energy drinks usually contain "empty" calories that you don't need — not to mention other stuff, like caffeine.

Tips for Eating at a Restaurant

Most restaurant portions are way larger than the average serving of food at home. Ask for half portions, share an entrée with a friend, or take half of your dish home.

Here are some other restaurant survival tips:

- Ask for sauces and salad dressings on the side and use them sparingly.
- Use salsa and mustard instead of mayonnaise or oil.
- Ask for olive or canola oil instead of butter, margarine, or shortening.
- Use nonfat or low-fat milk instead of whole milk or cream.
- Order baked, broiled, or grilled (not fried) lean meats including turkey, chicken, seafood, or sirloin steak.
- Salads and vegetables make healthier side dishes than french fries. Use a small amount of sour cream instead of butter if you order a baked potato.
- Choose fresh fruit instead of sugary, high-fat desserts.

Tips for Eating at the Mall or Fast-Food Place

With a little planning, it's easy to eat healthy foods at the mall. Here are some choices:

- a single slice of veggie pizza
- grilled, not fried, sandwiches (for example, a grilled chicken breast sandwich)
- deli sandwiches on whole-grain bread
- a small hamburger
- a bean burrito
- a baked potato
- a side salad
- frozen yogurt

Choose the smaller sizes, especially when it comes to drinks and snacks. If you have a craving for something unhealthy, try sharing the food you crave with a friend. Here's another tip for eating while shopping: Don't put off eating until you're so hungry you could inhale everything in sight. Set a time to eat, then stop what you're doing to take a break, sit down, and savor the food you are eating.

Tips for Eating in the School Caf

The suggestions for eating in a restaurant and at the mall apply to cafeteria food as well. Add vegetables and fruit whenever possible, and opt for leaner, lighter items. Choose sandwiches on whole-grain bread or a plain hamburger over fried foods or pizza. Go easy on the high-fat, low-nutrition items, such as mayonnaise and heavy salad dressings.

You might want to consider packing your own lunch occasionally. Here are some lunch items that pack a healthy punch:

- sandwiches with lean meats or fish, like turkey, chicken, tuna (made with low-fat mayo), lean ham, or lean roast beef. For variety, try other sources of protein, like peanut butter, hummus, or meatless chili. If you don't like your bread dry, choose mustard or a small amount of lite mayo.
- low-fat or nonfat milk, yogurt, or cheese
- any fruit that's in season
- raw baby carrots, green and red pepper strips, tomatoes, or cucumbers
- whole-grain breads, pita, bagels, or crackers

It can be easy to eat well, even on the run. And the good news is you don't have to eat perfectly all the time. It's OK to splurge every once in a while, as long as your food choices are generally good.

Nutrition AMI

1. How can high fat, high calorie, menu items affect a person's body.
2. List two things to remember that can help you make wise choices when eating out.
3. Name two restaurant survival tips.
4. List some items that you could pack for your lunch instead of eating cafe food.