



“I like to eat out with friends, but I also want to have a healthy diet. What can I do?”



Dining out is a wonderful time when you can relax and be with friends and family. But it can be difficult if you're watching your weight or simply trying to be healthy. Here are some helpful tips to make the experience less challenging.

Plan ahead

- If you have a choice, pick a place where you know the menu selections. You will have an easier time staying on track if you know what you're going to order.
- Watch what you eat during the day so that you stay within your calorie budget or dietary guidelines.
- Don't skip meals, and make sure you're not overly hungry when you get to the restaurant. This will help you avoid ordering unnecessary food and stay focused.
- Stay away from buffets, fast food and all-you-can-eat restaurants. Go to places that make your meal when ordered.
- Stay hydrated so that your body is not confusing hunger with thirst.
- When traveling, pack healthy snacks so you're not tempted to grab chips or a candy bar at the vending machine.

What to drink?

- Water is always a good choice. You can have the server put fruit in the glass if you prefer flavored water. Stay away from soda, juice, lemonade and sweetened ice teas. These all have sugar and extra calories.
- Alcoholic beverages also have a lot of calories and often a lot of sugar. To cut down on calories, choose beverages without mixes, salts and juices.
- Choose low fat milk rather than cream in your coffee.

Understand the menu

- Think about how you would eat at home, and follow the same guidelines. If you don't eat bread and butter or an appetizer prior to your entrée, then skip these items. Ask the server to remove the bread after you have one serving. If you do want these items, then order a smaller entrée to stay within your daily limits.
- Portion sizes can vary greatly among restaurants. Try sharing with a friend, ask for a smaller size, or have half of the meal packaged to go before it is brought to the table.
- Choose foods lower in fat, sodium and sugar. Ask your server how meals are prepared. You can ask for dressings and sauces on the side, no oil or butter, or no added salt.
- Ask for healthy substitutions: fruit rather than fries, steamed vegetables, baked potato rather than mashed potatoes, salad with dressing on the side, rather than coleslaw.
- Look for seafood, chicken and lean meats. Remove skin from chicken and cut off visible fat. Order lean deli meats such as turkey breast and roast beef rather than salami, bologna and chicken roll.
- Choose wisely at salad bars. Limit croutons, bacon bits, cheeses, marinated veggies, items with mayonnaise and creamy dressings. Go for light and fat-free dressings, fresh veggies, fresh fruit, seeds and beans.
- Watch condiments that have a lot of sodium and sugar. Limit cocktail sauce, ketchup, soy sauce, broths and foods that are pickled.
- Foods that are healthy choices will be described as broiled, poached, grilled, baked, roasted or steamed. Avoid foods that are breaded, pan-fried, sautéed, battered, au gratin, cheesy, creamy, fried or crispy.
- Choose whole grain rice, whole wheat pasta, or multigrain breads and tortillas over white versions.

Dining out can be an enjoyable, healthy experience. Learn to make healthier choices, and going out can become less stressful when watching your diet.