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Can You Get a Healthy Meal at Mickey Ds?

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Eating Well While Eating Out

By Michele J. Thomas

There are days when eating six home-cooked (or blended) meals just isn't an option. But wait before you declare a cheat day. It is possible to dine out and stay true to healthy nutrition principles, as long as you know what to order. For example, a McDonald's grilled chicken sandwich, weighing in at 340 calories, is a perfectly suitable balance of protein and carbohydrates (just be sure to hold the mayo). But order a large Schlotzsky's Deluxe Original sandwich and split it with a friend, and its 2,638 calories still exceed the recommended daily intake in all categories.

So perplexing are the choices at restaurants that many Challenge participants swear off eating out entirely, fearful of giving up control and blowing their Programs. But inevitably, life demands the occasional outside lunch or dinner. Here, we take you through the dining-out experience in an effort to transform it into something you look forward to instead of dread. Once you learn how to navigate menus for healthy food choices, you can avoid putting on excess bodyfat and avoid reversing all the progress you've already made.

Before you enter a restaurant, you need to be aware of a few common traps. Restaurants usually serve customers who eat three meals a day and are expecting a treat. For someone following the nutrition principles of Body-for-LIFE, the food can look like a smorgasbord of past loves. "Restaurants often base their menus on the taste of the food, not on the health aspects of the food," says Brad Schoenfeld, author of *Look Great Naked* and creator of www.lookgreatnaked.com. "They want to please your palate, and most of the time things that please your palate are fatty and sugary."

A bigger issue in the fight against bodyfat is how much a restaurant serves customers. For example, the FDA recommends between four and eight ounces of meat per day, but it is next to impossible to find a four- to eight-ounce steak on a dinner menu. "There is a tendency for larger portions now," says Jim Cannon, director of culinary operations for Ruth's Chris Steakhouse. In industrial kitchens, half-inch pieces of meat can turn out dry and tasteless; however, one-and-a-half-inch slabs tend to be more moist and can be cooked to order. "We have large portions because we get our steaks very thick, which allows us to cook them so that they're moist," says Cannon.

The problem with large portions is that people often concede to the "big plate" or "clear plate" syndrome. As children, many of us were told by our parents to clean our plates before we left the table. As we grew older, the conditioning stayed put. Faced with the option of taking home a doggie bag—and enduring the reprov-ing glances from others at the table—many of us just give in and finish the dish.

The key is to give up childhood habits that no longer serve us and instead do what we must to reach our goals. "Don't be shy when asking the waitstaff about portion sizes," says Mitzi Dulán, R.D., regional director of nutrition services and sports nutritionist at the San Francisco Bay Club. "Use what they tell you to plan the rest of your meal." Practice the "fist method" to measure portions, split entrées when appropriate, and take extra food home to enjoy later. Remember: The restaurant is there to serve you.

The Starter Course

When ordering appetizers, know what you're ordering for dinner first. If your entrée is an à la carte steak, then use the appetizer to get your healthy carbs and vegetables. If you're getting a pasta dish with no protein, order a protein dish to start. And no matter what type of restaurant you're eating in, choose foods that are nutritionally dense, but not dense in calories, such as green, leafy vegetables.

"Greens are basically like green water," says Schoenfeld. "Salad greens, broccoli, spinach salad—all of these foods are fibrous, so they have a lot of bulk yet are low in calories. They'll fill you up and decrease the amount of food you take in the rest of the time you're there." Even the healthiest salads can go awry with accoutrements—bacon bits, croutons, and dressings. "Oftentimes, restaurants use an industrial-size ladle to dish up salad dressing, which could add anywhere from 20 grams to 40 grams of fat," says Kathleen Klotzbach-Shimomura, assistant professor of Family Health at Rutgers University. Asking for salad dressing on the side allows you to control how much you use.

Soups are also a popular first-course, but beware. They can be deceptively high in calories. Consommé or gazpacho soups usually have less fat than cream soups and soups topped with cheese. Bean and broth-based soups are also smart choices. Be aware that most soup is high in sodium, which can dehydrate your body. So avoid them if you have high blood pressure.

The Main Event

Your main course will provide the bulk of your healthy proteins—and monstrous servings of fat if you're not careful. "If you're looking to have low-to moderate-fat choices when you're dining out, learn the menu clues that say 'less fat,'" says Klotzbach-Shimomura. Low-fat preparation methods include baked or blackened for chicken and fish—or broiled, grilled, or poached for meat (see sidebar). Even though meats are naturally protein-dense, cuts with the word "loin" in the name tend to be the leanest.

As far as carbohydrates, the best sources are unrefined foods. "Think brown," says Schoenfeld. "If you want bread with the meal, order brown breads, such as whole wheat or a pumpernickel. Instead of having white rice, get brown rice. Instead of a regular potato, order a yam." If something's not on the menu, ask. For the most part, restaurants are accommodating, and if they have the item available, they will substitute it.

If you order vegetables to accompany your entrée, consider how the vegetables are cooked. "A vegetable plate made with salsa or steamed is a

healthier choice than a plate of something like stuffed mushrooms," says Klotzbach-Shimomura. "Stuffed mushrooms usually have a breading and are made with butter to hold that breading together." Beware—even steamed or grilled vegetable dishes can have added oil or butter. Ask the waiter how the vegetables are prepared.

Just Desserts

Do we even need to tell you that cakes, ice creams, and cookies are high in fat and refined sugars and should be eaten *sparingly*? If you eat out frequently, you may want to make it a rule to forgo dessert. "If you've had your good carbohydrates, green vegetables, and protein—and you're still hungry, opt for fruit," says Schoenfeld. Don't forget that fruit is a carbohydrate high in natural sugar and will increase your portion of carbohydrates for the meal. If you're still interested but don't see it on the menu, ask anyway. Virtually all restaurants have fruit available and are generally happy to make up a fruit plate for you.

The Wine List

When eating out, the easiest way to consume extra calories is from alcoholic beverages. It's extremely important to keep your alcohol consumption at moderate levels, if you drink at all. "Alcohol is high in calories—it has seven calories per gram as opposed to the four calories per gram of protein and carbohydrates," says Schoenfeld. "Moreover, alcohol affects the way your cells metabolize fat." It requires your body to utilize certain coenzymes to neutralize it, but these coenzymes are also essential for fat oxidation. If these coenzymes are busy dealing with elevated blood sugar and alcohol, they're not busy helping to burn fat. Mixed drinks are worse than wine or beer because they usually add soda or juice, which are high-calorie beverages in their own right.

If you do have an alcoholic drink, alternate it with water or club soda to remain sober, hydrated, and to keep your caloric intake in check. (Water, of course, is essential to fat utilization, weight loss, and overall health). "People who dine out frequently," advises Dulan, "should aim for no more than four to seven glasses of alcohol per week."

Conclusion

If you're eating out on a free day, go wild. *Mangia*—enjoy every morsel, and order what you crave. But if you're not and you're required to eat out frequently, choose what you eat carefully. Don't worry about what others think about your requests. Once they see the results of your Body-for-LIFE, they'll be doing the same thing, too.

Reading Between the Lines

Even if you can't fry an egg, you're probably familiar with basic cooking terms such as baking and boiling. But do you know which preparation methods are "good" and which are "bad"?

LOOK FOR...

Baked: A dry-heat cooking method that heats food by surrounding it with hot, dry air in a closed environment.

Blackened: A Cajun cooking method in which food, usually meat or fish, is rubbed with a spice mixture and cooked in a hot cast-iron skillet, giving the food an extra-crisp crust.

Boiled: A moist-heat cooking method that uses convection to transfer heat from a hot liquid to the food submerged in it.

Broiled: A dry-heat cooking method in which foods are cooked by heat radiating from an overhead source. The high heat seals in the juices, browns the outside, and keeps the food tender.

Consommé: A rich stock or broth that has been clarified to remove impurities.

Grilled: A dry-heat cooking method in which foods are cooked by heat radiating from a source located below the cooking surface.

Marinated: A seasoned liquid, usually composed of a combination of vinegar, lemon juice, wine, oil, herbs, and/or spices, in which raw foods (typically meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or vegetables) are soaked or coated to absorb flavors and become tender before cooking or serving.

Poached: A moist-heat cooking method that uses convection to transfer heat from a hot liquid to the food submerged in it.

Roasted: A dry-heat cooking method that heats food by surrounding it with hot, dry air in a closed environment or on a spit over an open fire.

Sear: To brown the surface of meat very quickly in a hot oven, under a broiler, or in a pan over high heat on top of the stove to seal in juices.

Steam: A moist-heat cooking method in which heat is transferred by direct contact from steam to the food being cooked. The food to be steamed is placed in a basket or rack above the boiling liquid in a covered pan.

AVOID...

Brown: To caramelize the surface sugars of food by applying heat, invariably through a dry-heat cooking method.

Deep-fry: A dry-heat cooking method where food (usually coated in a batter or breading) is submerged in a vat of hot fat.

Frying: A dry-heat cooking method in which foods are cooked in a layer of hot fat—includes sautéing, stir-frying, pan-frying, and deep-frying.

Glaze: Food that has been coated with a glaze or sauce before or after it has been cooked.

Pan-fry: A dry-heat cooking method in which the food is placed in a moderate amount of hot fat.

Rémoulade: Mayonnaise-based sauce flavored with mustard, capers, chopped gherkins, herbs, and anchovies. Usually served with cold shellfish, fish, or meat.

Sauté: A dry-heat cooking method that transfers heat from a hot pan to food with the aid of a small amount of hot fat. Cooking is usually done quickly over high

temperatures, so food should be sliced thin and should be tender.

Stuff: To fill a cavity of a food with another food. This allows the filling to gain taste from the food into which it has been stuffed.

FIND OUT MORE WHEN YOU SEE...

Au gratin: Foods with a browned or crusted top. Often made by browning a food with a bread crumbs, grated cheese, and/or sauce topping under a broiler or salamander. Also known as gratinée.

Au jus: Roasted meats, poultry, or game served with their natural, unthickened juices.

Braise: A combination cooking method in which foods are first browned in hot fat, then covered and slowly cooked in a small amount of liquid over low heat. This method is ideal for tougher cuts of meat, fish, and certain vegetables.

Stew: A combination cooking method similar to braising but involving smaller pieces of meat that are first blanched and then served with a sauce and various garnishes.

Stir-fry: A dry-heat cooking method similar to sautéing in which foods are cooked over very high heat with little fat. Usually done in a wok or skillet.

Vinaigrette: A temporary emulsion of oil and vinegar (usually three parts oil to one part vinegar) seasoned with herbs, spices, salt, and pepper; used as a salad dressing or sauce.

Critiquing Cuisines

Here are some tips for eating well when enjoying international cuisines.

Italian

Choose pasta with low-fat sauces such as marinara, red clam, or white clam. Avoid alfredo and cream sauces, which contain loads of fat. When ordering a protein source with your pasta, avoid meatballs, since they're an additional two to three ounces of meat each and may not be made with lean ground meat. Nibble from the antipasto plates sparingly—they're often loaded with fatty meats or include treats cooked with butter, margarine, or oil. Minestrone soup is a good appetizer, if made solely with vegetables, pasta or rice, and seasonings.

Mexican

The key to eating at Mexican or Tex-Mex restaurants is simple: Avoid anything fried (which is a lot!) Bean burritos may contain refried beans made with lard or fat. Watch out for crispy tortillas, hard taco shells, chimichangas, and tostadas, which are usually deep-fried in lard or fat. Fajitas are a safe bet because the meat (chicken, beef, or pork) is generally extra lean and boneless. Just beware of add-ins like sour cream or cheese. Salsa is always an excellent add-in and goes well with rice and grilled dishes.

Chinese

Chinese restaurants will usually steam any fish, meat, or vegetable and cook without MSG at your request. Stir-fry dishes (chicken, beef, scallops, shrimp, or tofu) can be healthy if a minimal amount of oil is used. Make sure chow mein dishes are stir-fried and not fried. Lo mein may be a better choice if prepared without oils. Just say no to Peking duck (usually coated with honey and white flour and then roasted), egg foo young (fried and contains a carbohydrate-rich sauce), fried dim sum, and other deep-fried appetizers. Stick with steamed dishes such as steamed vegetable dumplings or steamed broccoli with tofu or chicken.

Japanese

As with Mexican, avoid the fried dishes. Order salmon, albatross tuna, or shrimp sushi, as all are high in CLA. Chicken, beef, or pork teriyaki are generally healthy choices, as are yakimono (broiled or grilled) fish and chicken. Avoid tempura and any dish with the word "atsu,"—which often connotes deep-fried with a batter—such as tonkatsu (deep-fried pork), torikatsu (deep-fried chicken), and katsudon (deep-fried pork, onion, and poached egg).

French

The upside about French restaurants is that portion sizes are small. The downside? Most dishes are loaded with cream and cheese and can pack quite a wallop. Look for lighter fare prepared with wine or herbs, like bouillabaisse, poached salmon, coq au vin, poulet aux fines herbes, ratatouille, steamed mussels, and fish en papillote. Avoid processed foods, organ meats, and heavy cheese dishes, such as sweetbreads, foie gras, quiche Lorraine, and fondue.

Indian

If you don't mind extra spice, most Indian dishes are quite healthy. Just avoid curries made with coconut milk and parathas, a whole-wheat bread that is fried. Instead, stick with vegetable curries and naan, a baked flatbread made with wheat flour and sourdough. Dals, chapatis, biryanis, pilafs, and tandoori chicken or fish are all healthy options as they contain vegetables and wheat flour.

Middle Eastern/Greek

Middle Eastern and Greek restaurants are great places to order lamb because lean, marinated cuts are necessary for most dishes. Shish kabobs, pilafs, and couscous are low-fat, well-seasoned choices for proteins and grains. Watch out for dishes with feta cheese or nuts, as the fat can quickly add up. If you're sensitive to sodium or have high blood pressure, know many Middle Eastern dishes are high in salt.

BEST and WORST Guide to Popular Restaurants

Whether you're eating in a fast-food dive or one of the best restaurants in the country, you can find *something* healthy on the menu. We studied the menus at popular national chains and picked the three healthiest—and three unhealthiest—items on each menu.

McDonald's

BEST

- McSalad Shaker Garden Salad with Fat Free Herb Vinaigrette: It's quick, filling, and with a total of 135 calories, a smart choice for lunch on the go.
- Hamburger: This popular sandwich is 290 calories if taken plain without cheese, even though 90 of those calories are from fat.
- Chicken McGrill: This grilled chicken sandwich is a little high in sodium, but without mayonnaise, it comes to 340 calories.

WORST

- Big Xtra! with Cheese: This is a Big Extra indeed! This monster packs 810 calories—almost half of which come from saturated fat—and 1,870 mg of sodium.
- Super Size French Fries: Everybody likes French fries, but nobody needs the extra 610 calories. If you've got the urge, get the small size

fries, the Super Size version equals 25% of the recommended daily allowance of saturated fats.

- Big Mac: This sandwich comes bearing almost 600 calories and 1,090 mg of sodium. 'Nuff said.

Burger King

BEST

- Chicken Tenders—4 piece: These bite-size pieces come 170 calories and won't take too much of a bite out of your fitness plan.
- Whopper Jr. without mayonnaise: With 350 calories, it doesn't seem "junior" but it's one of the healthiest in the house.
- Hash Brown Rounds—small: If you're in a hurry, this breakfast item along with some egg whites won't slow you down.

WORST

- BK Big Fish Sandwich: Because it's a fish sandwich, this may seem a healthy choice. However, this Big Fish is packing big calories and sodium: a whopping 710 and 1,200 mg respectively.
- Double Whopper with Cheese: It's a triple whammy of calories, fat, and sodium. Skip it.
- Biscuit with Sausage, Egg, and Cheese: This svelte breakfast treat is loaded with sodium. No matter how hard you exercise, nobody needs 650 calories in the morning.



Denny's

BEST

- **Vegetable Beef Soup:** This soup is low in fat and calories, but watch out for its 820 mg of sodium.
- **Garden Chicken Deluxe Salad:** Skip the dressing and this simple salad is a great choice for lunch or dinner. Only 277 calories and 5 g fat.
- **Grilled Alaska Salmon Dinner:** This dinner gives you an ideal serving size of low-fat, high protein salmon.

WORST

- **Meat Lover's Skillet:** To tackle this entree, you'd better love extra calories as well—the dishes has 1,344 of them.
- **T-Bone Steak Dinner:** This steak is served on the bone, which means that it's higher in saturated fat. The fried onion rings and corn cooked with butter don't help.
- **Appetizer Sampler:** Just can't wait for dinner? Well, the 1405 calories, 24 grams of saturated fat, and 5305 mg of sodium should make you want to wait forever.

Panda Express

BEST

- **Mixed Vegetables:** Simple, stir-fried, and delicious.
- **Hot & Sour Soup:** It may be a bit higher in sodium, but it's low on calories from fat.
- **Steamed Rice:** Even though it's white and not brown, it's the lesser of many evils.

WORST

- **Sweet & Sour Pork or Chicken:** The sauce is loaded with sodium and calories. Save this one for your free day.
- **Vegetable Spring Rolls:** Don't let this one fool you, the rolls are deep-fried in oil and loaded with sodium and MSG.
- **Beef with Broccoli:** Can you say high sodium with fat and oil?

TGI Friday's

BEST

- **Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich:** Another, fairly basic grilled chicken sandwich. Skip the honey mustard dressing and you've got a great choice.
- **Fresh Vegetable Medley:** This is a vegetable plate served with fat-free plum sauce and vinaigrette on the side.

- **Grilled Chicken Caesar:** Your basic chicken salad is always a good pick. Take it without dressing, if possible, or on the side.

WORST

- **Jack Daniel's Steak & Shrimp:** The 12-ounce steak is heavy enough without battered jumbo shrimp and "loaded" baked potato.
- **Baby Back Ribs:** This entrée packs some serious calories and fat. Skip it.
- **Friday's Tostado Nachos:** This appetizer has it all—bacon-flavored refried beans, nacho meat, cheese, sour cream, and a boatload of saturated fat, calories, and sodium.

The Olive Garden

BEST

- **Veal Scaloppini:** A low-fat meat like veal sautéed in olive oil and white wine rather than butter—who says healthy eating has to be dull?
- **Capellini Pomodoro:** Very simple, very tasty, and very healthy pasta dish with tomatoes, garlic, and fresh basil.
- **Chicken Giardino:** Simple vegetables and chicken tossed with pasta in a lemon-herb sauce.

WORST

- **Stuffed Mushrooms:** As appetizers go, this one packs a wallop.
- **Lasagna Classico:** Layers of pasta, meat sauce, and cheese? Did you really have to wonder?
- **Tour of Italy:** There's a lot of carbs and cheese going on here. Stick to the travel brochure.

Ruth's Cris Steakhouse

BEST

- **Salmon Filet:** Available broiled or with Cajun spices, this simple entrée is certainly a healthy choice.
- **Veal Chops:** Low fat and high flavor—go for it, but watch those portion sizes!
- **Petit Filet:** This steak is tender and smaller than the 12- to 16-oz original. Enjoy.

WORST

- **Stuffed Chicken Breast:** The operative word here is "stuffed." The double roasted breast is served with herb cheese and lemon butter.
- **Cowboy Rib Eye:** This steak is huge and served bone-in, which means bonus fat and calories.
- **Shrimp Rémoulade:** Seafood yes, but served with high fat herb mayonnaise. Skip it. |||||

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