

Eating Nutritiously when Dining Out

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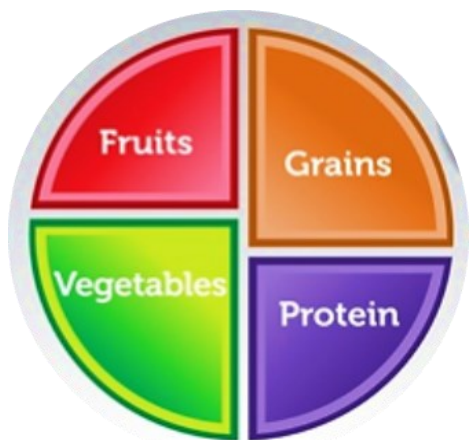


Source: The New York Times Photo by Tony Cenicola and Jason Henry

A day or night out is always exciting. Ever wondered how to incorporate good nutrition when eating at restaurants? Continue reading and you will learn how this can be done simply and enjoyably.

Meals at restaurants tend to be higher in calories, sodium, added sugar, and saturated fats, when compared to home cooked meals. If eating out at restaurants is something you frequently do then it is particularly important to be mindful of the food choices you make as this can impact your health.

An ideal restaurant menu would include enough variety that you will be able to have servings of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and healthy protein sources on your plate. Many restaurants make their menus available online, therefore, try to plan your order before going to the restaurant. Some restaurants include nutrition information like calorie counts or may even have more detailed nutrition information on their menu. This would be ideal for making informed decisions and for easy calorie tracking or logging of meals.



Source: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

- **For portioning meals:** Remember to fill $\frac{1}{2}$ your plate with colorful vegetables and fruits, $\frac{1}{4}$ with plant proteins like legumes, and $\frac{1}{4}$ with healthy carbohydrates like grains.
 - **To reduce sodium:** You can simply ask for a lower sodium option if available. Also, instead of adding more salt to your meals when they are served, try flavouring with fresh lime or lemon, or your own low sodium spice mix. Condiments or sauces can be used sparingly and requested to be served at the side so that you can control how much you add to your plate.
 - **To reduce calories:** Avoid increasing the size of meals to larger sizes, skip or have a small or light appetizer like a garden salad or a broth, and choose foods lower in fat. Snack on healthy snacks like fruits or nuts before going to the restaurant to prevent overeating due to hunger, and do not force yourself to eat everything on your plate if you are full.
- Stick to grilled, boiled, poached, braised, roasted, steamed, and baked cooking methods, as these options tend to be lower in calories than their greasy counterparts. Another option is to share your entree or take half of meal home. Remember to carry leftovers home and refrigerate within 2 hours to prevent food spoilage.

- **To reduce added sugar:** Order fruit for desert, frozen yogurt, or other options lower in sugar. Be mindful of sweet drinks like sodas, fruit-flavored drinks, milkshakes and other sweet drinks that may be high in sugar. Share sweet desserts with a friend to cut down on sugar intake or skip dessert altogether.
- **Drink selections** can be high in calories and added sugars. Alcoholic beverages and milky or heavier drinks tend to be higher in calories. Stick to plain or sparkling water if watching your weight. If consuming alcoholic beverages, the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends drinking in moderation by limiting intake to 2 drinks or less per day for men or 1 drink or less per day for women.

The image to the right shows what is considered 1 serving for each type of drink. Refer below to possible drink choices for lower calorie options.



Source: CDC

Menu choice modifications to reduce calorie intake:

Food:

- 1 medium baked potato (161 calories) vs. 1 medium serving of French fries (365 calories)
- 1 cup steamed vegetables (40 calories) vs. 1 cup sautéed vegetables (150 calories)
- 100g Baked tofu (184 calories) vs. 100g fried tofu (271 calories)
- 2 cups pasta with tomato-based sauce (784 calories) vs. 2 cups pasta with cream sauce (1010 calories)
- 1 cup fruit cocktail (109 calories) vs. 1 cup ice cream (274 calories)



Drinks:

- 12 fl. oz. sparkling water (0 calories) vs. 12 fl. oz. soda (333 calories)
- 8 fl. oz. fruit smoothie (138 calories) vs. 8 fl. oz. vanilla milkshake (256 calories)
- 8 fl. oz. vodka and soda (133 calories) vs. 8 fl. oz. margarita (274 calories)
- 12 fl. oz. light beer (104 calories) vs. 12 fl. oz. regular beer (155 calories)
- 5 oz. white wine (121 calories) vs. 5 oz. Sangria, white (141 calories)

References:

<https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/>

<https://www.myfitnesspal.com/food/search>

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/moderate-drinking.htm#>