

RESTAURANTS: MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

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Dining out is part of our daily lives. Making healthy decisions on what to eat while dining out will go a long way to controlling your weight, and your overall health.

At restaurants, you have plenty of choices. And there are a few tools available to help you make those choices healthy ones.

Your first tool is the menu. Some restaurants provide nutritional information right on the menu so you can make healthier choices. For example, some restaurants note on their menus those dishes that are light in calories, or are heart-healthy selections. The amount of fat, carbohydrate and calories may be listed.

Just as important as recognizing healthy dishes, it's also important to know what not to choose, and that's not always easy. Here are some words that signal a selection is probably high in fat, and therefore not the healthiest choice to make: creamed, fried, sautéed, crispy and au gratin. Avoid these items when you can, or ask that the meal be prepared differently.

Before deciding on a restaurant, call ahead and ask what healthy choices the restaurant offers. If they don't offer any selections you like, call another. It's your choice.

"A lot of restaurants now are putting their restaurant, and their menus, on the web. And you can actually go on the website and check to see what the menus are. And if you're not satisfied or you have questions, then you can call them."

Ask your server what healthy menu items they recommend. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

"Could you tell me, how is the fish prepared?"

"Our orange roughy is prepared ... "

Ask if the chef can prepare your food in a healthier way than what may be described in the menu. Can your fish or chicken entrée be grilled, broiled or baked instead of fried? Can the vegetables be steamed, rather than sautéed?

Ask if there are low fat versions of otherwise high-fat or high-calorie items, like: salad dressings, gravy, butter, sour cream or sauces. And ask that they be served on the side. This way you can use them sparingly.

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For salads, try dipping your fork into the dressing and then into the salad.

“Try to eat things where you can actually add some fat yourself, and sparingly, and still enjoy it.”

Another thing to be aware of, is that filling up on bread or rolls before your meal adds extra calories; so do the extra large portions typically served in restaurants.

Dining out can be quite enjoyable. Making the right choices will help make your meals healthy.