

Cardiac Rehabilitation: Heart Healthy Dining Out Tips

For many of us, dining out is a regular part of our daily lives. And for a lot of us, making healthy food choices while dining out can be difficult. But when you have had a heart event, or are living with heart disease, making healthy food decisions, even while dining out, is an important skill for good heart health.

Your cardiac rehabilitation program can help you know what to look for when faced with any menu.

If possible, make a healthy dining out choice before you even get to the restaurant. Take a look at restaurant menus online and choose to eat at the ones with the healthiest choices. If you know which choices are best for you before you get there, you won't feel pressured or be as tempted to make an impulse order.

At the restaurant, use your menu as a tool to help make healthy choices. Many restaurants highlight nutritional information right on the menu so you can make healthier choices for your personal health goals. For example, they may note dishes that are lower in calories to help you watch your weight. Or they may list heart healthy selections that may be lower in sodium and unhealthy fats.

Choose meals that include the words: steamed, poached, roasted, baked or grilled in the description. Avoid meals with creamed, fried, sautéed, crispy or au gratin in the description. These words signal a selection that is probably high in fat and calories.

Choose entrees that feature chicken, fish, vegetables or lean meats, instead of fatty meat.

Remember, what you order is your choice. You can ask your server what healthier options are available. Or you can ask to have your food prepared in a way that is healthier for you. For example, you can ask to have your fish or chicken entrée grilled, broiled or baked instead of fried. You can ask that your vegetables be steamed instead of sautéed. And be sure to ask if there are any added fats to sides that may seem like good choices, such as butter added to green beans.

Also, ask that any dressings or sauces be served on the side. This way you can use them sparingly. For salads, try dipping your fork into the dressing and then into the salad.

Soup is usually a great way to fill up on vegetables, just make sure that it isn't a cream or bisque soup. Soups can also be high in sodium so double check the menu values or ask for a low-sodium option.

Filling up on breads or rolls before your meal adds extra calories. You may want to lessen the temptation and ask your server not to bring any bread to the table or to take it away.

Keep in mind that most meals in restaurants are larger portions than we need. You can ask the server to prepackage

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half your meal to take home. This way you eat healthy and have a meal for another day.

Whether you dine out on a regular basis, or once in a while, dining out is something everyone enjoys. With the help of your cardiac rehabilitation program, you can have the tools you need to make healthy food choices in every dining out situation.

Remember to check the menu on the website before you go, use the menu as a tool to choose healthy options, ask your server for healthier options, eat half and take the rest home.

If you have trouble finding a healthy option at your favorite restaurant, bring the menu in to your cardiac rehab team and ask them for tips. Together, you can find healthy, tasty options for better heart health.