

Making Healthy Choices at Fast Food Restaurants

Choosing healthier foods while dining out can be a challenge.

But even when you eat at a fast food restaurant there are ways to make your choices healthier. Start with a manageable portion size.

You may be tempted to answer yes to increasing the size of your order. It may sound like a good deal money-wise but bigger is not always better.

Stick with the small size; you'll get the same taste but a lot less calories, fat and sodium and still pay less.

Or you could share the meal with a friend.

Choose to get creative with combos. If you really want a higher-fat cheeseburger then why not choose something a little healthier on the side? Instead of French fries, try a small salad, or fruit slices?

To balance out the highly salty fast food why not add an extra tomato to your sandwich or salad or bring an apple or orange from home to eat as a side. Fruits and veggies can help to lower your blood pressure and protect your heart.

"Anywhere I go, diet soda is definitely my go-to, typically. I guess, well, fast food always has grilled options, so I can do that."

If chicken is what you like, choose grilled chicken as a healthier substitute for deep fried chicken items.

At the Mexican fast food restaurant hold the sour cream and cheese. Instead you could order a little guacamole on the side. That has the good kind of fat in it. But watch your portion size – it's also high in calories.

Let's take a look at the nutritional values of two different meals.

This cheeseburger, large fries and regular soda amount to 1100 calories while the smaller meal with a small diet soda is 640 calories.

Can you see the difference? Which meal would you choose?

"Key thing in a fast food restaurant is not to be seduced by the bargain deals that throw in the French fries and throw in the sweetened beverage. So maybe to opt for the unsweetened tea, and if you get the fries, to get a smaller version or throw half out before you're tempted to eat the whole thing."

Check out the Nutrition Information Guide. Some restaurants may have it posted on the wall by the counter or check out their website before you visit.

These guides show you the number of calories, Total Carbohydrate, and Total Fat including saturated fats and trans fats in each of the products they serve.

Select foods that are low in calories and not too high in carbohydrate and fat.

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But also take a look at the fine print. Some of the nutritional values listed are for items without cheese or condiments. Does this match what you're ordering?

If you can, take the Nutrition Guide with you and make a plan for the next time you order.

Today even fast food restaurants are trying to provide you with healthier options.

The next time you're ordering at the fast food restaurant you can make a healthier choice.

You can eat the smaller portion of food; share the meal with a friend; skip the high-fat condiments; get creative with your combos; pick healthier sides; use the Nutrition Guides available in person or online.

Soon, even easy and convenient can mean healthier for you.