

Dining Out: Making Better Choices

With all the talk about losing weight, eating too much fat or not enough protein, many restaurants have begun gearing their menus toward a healthier way of eating. More people are becoming conscious about what they eat; therefore, finding items on the menus of their favorite restaurants is no longer difficult. Most restaurants will prepare foods the way you request without giving you an unwanted response like "What, no butter on your potato," It won't taste very good." Many chefs have made substitutions in their cooking to keep the taste in their dishes.



Here is a list of some of your favorite types of restaurants and what to order, what to avoid and how to order to stay in your eating plan:

MEXICAN

Two very popular dishes when going out for Mexican food are chili rellenos and cheese enchiladas. These dishes should no longer be on your list if you want to eat healthy and not blow your eating plan. You would wind up getting more fat grams in that one meal than you are allowed all day. The main items to avoid at a Mexican Restaurant are: cheese, sour cream, avocado, flour tortillas, refried beans and the fried tortilla chips. If you know where you are going in advance, you can bring some baked chips along with you or ask the waitress for steamed corn tortillas to dip into the salsa. Most salsa is fine to eat, but avoid the chili con queso dip as an appetizer (its loaded with fat). Remember, it's not just the fat by itself you want to avoid, it is the fat with the carbohydrates. Here is a comparison of good choices vs. bad choices:

TYPICAL MEAL:

Chili con queso/chips
Chili Rellenos
Refried Beans
Mexican rice (with lard)
Gold Margarita

BETTER CHOICE:

Salsa with corn tortillas (steamed)
Chicken Fajitas- use corn tortillas or
1 flour tortilla (if you can't resist) Lettuce & tomato
Black beans
Mexican Rice (if no lard is used)
Lite Margarita

CHINESE

Beyond the contrary belief, Chinese food can be very healthy eating if you know how to order. Of course, just like many other types of food preparations, Chinese food is prepared with many types of oils. Some favorite Chinese dishes are battered and fried. Fried rice, egg rolls and Szechwan dishes with peanuts and almonds are extremely high in fat. The Chinese use steamed white rice and many vegetables in their dishes, so take advantage of these items. Here is an example of a popular meal versus what you should try next time:

TYPICAL MEAL:

Egg drop soup
Egg roll
Fried rice
Kung Pao chicken

BETTER CHOICE:

Skip the soup- too high in sodium
Steamed vegetable dumplings
Steamed rice
Steamed Shrimp or chicken with ginger sauce on the side
Steamed vegetables

ITALIAN

Now, this one may be your hardest meal to avoid the fat and high carbohydrates to keep your intake in balance. Your foods to avoid at Italian restaurants are cheese, sausage, high fat ground beef and cream sauces. The famous fettucine alfredo is loaded with fat. Remember, just ordering pasta with marinara sauce (no protein) is a very high carbohydrate meal- usually 80-100 grams in the meal. If you want to keep your carbohydrate intake low and still get satisfied, order like this:

TYPICAL MEAL:

Fettucine Alfredo
Garlic bread
Salad with heavy oil dressing
Red Wine

BETTER CHOICE:

Shrimp or scallops with angel hair pasta- marinara sauce
1 piece of bread (no garlic butter)
Salad - green and tomatoes w/ red wine & vinegar dressing
White wine spritzer

As you can see, out of the three types of meals you might choose to eat when dining out, you can still maintain your healthy eating habits and not have to "go off the plan" every time you go out to dinner. Do not let dining out be your excuse to over eat!! Stay in control of your eating - You only have one body - Take care of it!