

Eating Out

People in the United States eat out in a restaurant or other commercial food establishment an average of 4.2 times per week according to *Meal Consumption Behavior (2000)*, a recent report by the National Restaurant Association. Employees will benefit from some direction on healthy choices when eating out. Many employees will buy their lunch in the Canteen, order in from restaurants, or go off site. Approximately two meals per week are eaten from a commercial establishment. Eating out is fun but it can be a source of food that is high in fat and calories. This happens for several reasons. Many restaurants serve food that has a highly-concentrated calorie content. In addition, portion sizes served in restaurants are large, and super-size often means super calories. The extra calories will add up over time. A recent study found children eat almost 200 calories more per day when they eat one meal at a fast-food restaurant. Most children will eat a fast food meal at least once every 3 days. This will result in a weight gain of 6 pounds per year.

It can be difficult to know the calorie content of different foods at restaurants. Today, we are seeing more healthy food choices at restaurants. Legislation has been proposed to require nutrition information on restaurant menus. We are seeing more restaurants changing their menus and cooking processes to support healthy diets. Sharing ways to make special requests and substitutions when eating out may be helpful. Also, teaching how to control the portion size by asking for smaller portions, sharing entrees with a companion, or putting half of the meal in a to-go box to enjoy another day could be beneficial. Also, remember that the same tips apply to prepared, ready-to-eat foods that many supermarkets and specialty stores offer.

Helping employees learn to make healthy food choices when eating out may be done on-site through lunch and learns, handouts, bulletin boards, or on an employee wellness page on the local Intranet. Individuals can eat healthy when eating out by having a better understanding of healthy food choices. Following are some tips for healthy dining out.

Restaurant Tips

Choose restaurants that have healthy options. Many restaurants have Web sites. Check out menus in advance.

It does not all have to be eaten—ask for part of the meal to be packaged to go.

Food Preparation

Do not be afraid to ask how items are prepared.

Ask for low fat cooking spray or little or no butter or oil to be used.

Look for choices that are roasted, poached, steamed, baked, and grilled rather than sautéed, deep fried, or pan fried. If it is sautéed, ask for wine or lemon juice to be used. If fried foods are eaten, remove any breading and skin.

Ask for sauces on the side.

Appetizers—Choose Soup or Salad

Choose clear broth soups or tomato-based soups.

Avoid cream-based choices such as a bisque, chowder, or cheese soup.

Avoid salads that contain fried foods. Ask for poultry, meat, or seafood to be grilled.

Ask for fat free or low fat dressing. Always ask for the dressing to be put on the side, not tossed in the salad. Try vinegar or lemon juice on salad.

Leave off extras like croutons, cheese, egg, nuts, fried noodle strips, etc.

Entrée

When choosing vegetarian choices, avoid cheese, cream, etc.

Select skinless poultry, preferably white meat, and lean cuts of beef and pork such as tenderloin, London broil, or filet mignon. Avoid ribs, prime rib, and other marbled meats.

Sides

Choose colorful vegetables.

Skip the creamed vegetables or those that have cheese.

Be adventurous. Try something new instead of the old stand-by of French fries.

Choose fresh fruit or a tossed salad over potato salad, coleslaw, macaroni salad, etc.

Beverages

Drink plenty of water or low calorie sugar-free beverages with the meal.

Consider low fat or skim milk.

Dessert

Order fresh fruit.

Choose a small bowl of low fat ice cream, sorbet, sherbet, gelatin, or a piece of angel food cake.

If dessert is ordered, split it with someone else.

Bread

If bread is too tempting, ask the server not to bring the basket to the table.

Limit bread to one slice per meal. Choose baked bread, rolls, and saltine crackers instead of croissants, biscuits, and cornbread.

Leave off butter or margarine. For toast, ask for it dry.

Eat slowly. Take plenty of time to savor the food's flavor. Enjoy!

More information is available on the MOVEmployee! Web site at: www.move.va.gov.

