

Health and Wellness

News You Can Use

What to avoid (and select) when eating in restaurants



Though it may seem like an impossible feat, you can maintain your diet while dining out with friends and family, and still have an enjoyable experience.

Since restaurants (especially fast food chains) tend to serve meals with more fat, salt and sugar than a meal prepared at home, it is important to understand what foods to avoid and which ones to select from the menu.

These days, you can find healthful foods almost everywhere. The trick is to know what you're getting into before you get to the restaurant and are tempted by enticing menu descriptions. Many restaurants have their menus online — some with nutrition information readily available. You'll be able to choose the destination with the healthiest options, and go into the eatery ready to order the best meal and ask for substitutions where necessary.

Before you head out, make a plan

- Eat a light dinner if you ate a big lunch that day. Or, if you know ahead of time that you're going to a restaurant, plan to have lighter meals during the day.
- Make a commitment to eat slowly. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you are no longer hungry. Fast eaters often are overeaters, while slow eaters tend to eat less and are still satisfied.
- Make physical activity part of dining out. All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes. Pick a restaurant that's a 10- or 15-minute walk. You'll get your meal, 30 minutes of physical activity and avoid the parking hassles. Or, get moving as a group before or after eating. A brisk walk before a meal gives you time to chat. A stroll afterward helps your digestion.

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Foods to avoid

There are many foods full of excess fat and calories that can destroy your healthy diet. Steer clear of these foods while dining out:

- Condiments such as salad dressings, cheese sauces, tartar sauce, gravy and guacamole
- Butter and cheese
- Fried foods such as chicken or French fries
- Beverages such as regular soda, whole milk and various alcoholic drinks

Foods to try

To make healthier decisions while dining out, try some of these foods to keep your diet on track:

- Soups made with juices and broth instead of cream

- Raw vegetables without a marinade
- Fresh fruit
- Steamed seafood
- Poached or boiled eggs
- Salads with low-calorie or fat-free dressing on the side
- Whole-grain breads and crackers
- Baked, boiled and steamed potatoes without sour cream, butter or cheese
- Roasted, baked, broiled and grilled meats and poultry
- Diet soda, low/non-fat milk, or water
- Yogurt
- Whole wheat tortillas

General suggestions

In addition to opting for healthier foods, there are many other things you can do

as a restaurant patron to make your dining experience less fattening. First, order your food to go. Research suggests that Americans eat less at home on their own plates than they do in a restaurant. In addition, you can prepare a healthy side dish to accompany the meal you purchased from the restaurant.

Finally, one of the most important proactive approaches to healthy eating you can do is to watch your portion sizes. Restaurant portions are typically double what you would normally eat at home. Either request a smaller portion of the desired meal or ask the wait staff to wrap up half the meal right away and take it home to eat the next day.

Recipe

Healthy recipe: Cracked pepper potato chips with onion dip



Ingredients

For the chips

- 3 large russet potatoes (2 ¼ pounds total) sliced into ¼-inch thick rounds
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp coarsely ground black pepper
- Salt

For the dip

- 2 tsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced, greens and whites separated
- 1 ¼ cups nonfat Greek style yogurt or 1 ⅔ cups regular nonfat plain yogurt
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- ¾ tsp onion powder
- ¾ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper

Directions

Make chips: Toss potatoes in a large bowl with 2 tablespoons of oil, and pepper until well coated. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Arrange potato slices in 1 layer on 2 cookie sheets. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until chips are crisped and lightly browned. Remove from oven, season with salt and cool.

Make dip: Heat oil over medium heat and add onions and scallion whites. Cook, stirring often, until golden brown and soft, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and allow cooling.

If using regular yogurt, place it in a strainer lined with a paper towel and set the strainer over a bowl. Let the yogurt drain and thicken for 20 minutes.

Combine onions with thickened or Greek-style yogurt, mayonnaise, onion powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper and scallion greens and stir well to incorporate. Chill for 1 hour to let flavors meld. Serve with chips.

Source: *Foodnetwork.com*