



healthy dining finder.com



■ New **Online** Resource Identifies Healthier Choices at Restaurants

By Erica Bohm, MS

If you're like most Americans, more and more of your meals these days are being prepared by restaurants and other food service establishments. In fact, according to the National Restaurant Association, close to 50 cents of every food dollar is spent away from home – equating to four to five meals per week, on average.

When perusing a restaurant's menu, it isn't always easy to identify the healthier choices. But now, a recently launched Web site, developed by a team of health and nutrition professionals, has come to the rescue of those whose lifestyle or personal preference involves frequent visits to restaurants.

At HealthyDiningFinder.com, health and weight-conscious consumers can "search" for restaurants that offer a selection of healthier choices.

How it Works

You start by specifying your geographic location, preferred price range, and if desired, availability of take-out, delivery and catering. A list of "matched" restaurants will appear. Clicking on any of them links you to a list of that restaurant's healthier dishes – up to 10 of them – along with corresponding nutrition information: calories, fat, saturated fat, protein, carbohydrates, cholesterol, sodium, sugar, fiber and fruit/vegetable servings.

You'll find everything from fast food to upscale dining on the site. Restaurants don't need a reputation of being "healthy" to be included on HealthyDiningFinder.com. In fact, the program encourages all types of restaurants to join Healthy Dining and

HealthyDiningFinder.com and offer a selection of *better for you* choices.

Menu items posted on the site must meet Healthy Dining's nutrition criteria (i.e., entrées or full meals must include lean protein, fruits and/or vegetables or whole grains, and they may not contain more than 750 calories, 25 grams of fat and 8 grams of saturated fat. Many of the featured dishes weigh in at much less.).

For appetizers, side dishes and desserts, the cut-offs are scaled down to 250 calories, 8 grams of fat and 3 grams of saturated fat. No fried foods are listed, aside from very small amounts, as in a garnish; and a maximum of two red meat dishes are listed for any restaurant. Healthy Dining's registered dietitians review and approve all the menu items before the items are posted on the site.

"Special Requests"

Some featured items include a "Special Request," a simple modification in the dish's preparation developed in collaboration with the restaurant, which reduces the amount of calories and fat. Examples include reductions in the amount of cheese, oil, sauce or dressing. Specific amounts are noted in a "Special Request."

About HealthyDiningFinder.com

HealthyDiningFinder.com was developed by California-based Healthy Dining. Its team of health and nutrition professionals has been dedicated to restaurant nutrition for almost two decades.

Since 1990, they have been providing computerized nutrition analysis and consultation to Southern California restaurants and

publishing a series of books that feature healthier menu choices and corresponding nutrition information.

In 2004, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention awarded Healthy Dining a grant to develop an online, nationwide version of their Southern California publication-based program.

HealthyDiningFinder.com launched in March 2007. Approximately 50,000 restaurant locations are participating to date, and more restaurants are joining regularly. The first phase of the project has focused on chain restaurants – both nationwide and regional. In the coming months and years, outreach to smaller and independent restaurants will ramp up.

Through HealthyDiningFinder.com, consumers have an easy way to identify the healthier choices at restaurants. And equally important, the Healthy Dining Program is a vehicle that guides, motivates and recognizes restaurants with respect to offering and promoting healthier choices.

About the Author:

Erica Bohm, MS, is vice-president and Director of Strategic Partnerships for Health Dining. Erica develops strategic partnerships within the restaurant industry and health community, coordinates restaurant enrollment and promotes the Web site to the media and the public. She has been with Healthy Dining since 1993.



7 MYTHS about Restaurant Dining and Nutrition

1. Chicken and fish are always good choices.

Sure, chicken (specifically white meat) and fish are lower in calories, fat and saturated fat than red meat. However, other factors play a role as well, such as portion size, preparation method, and sauces and other added ingredients, like oil or cheese.

2. Red meat dishes are not good choices for the health-conscious.

True, the less red meat in the diet, the better. However, those who enjoy red meat can do so, keeping four guidelines in mind:

- Select lean cuts (like sirloin).
- Trim the visible fat.
- Limit red meat to once or twice a week.
- Monitor portion size.

Since 3-4 oz. of protein is the recommended portion size per meal, consider the following options when restaurant dining:

- Share a red meat entrée with your dining companion and complement it with a white meat entrée or extra side dish.
- Take some of the dish home to enjoy the next day.
- “Bank” part of your protein allotment from other meals of the day to allow for a larger portion during your meal out.
- Try Asian dishes, which often combine protein with vegetables, as they provide a great way to limit the amount of red meat.

3. Vegetarian dishes are always healthy.

Americans are falling short of the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables – sources of good nutrition. That doesn't mean that all vegetarian dishes are good choices. Dishes that contain a lot of cheese, oil or nuts could be very high in calories, fat and even saturated fat (cheese). And some vegetarian dishes do not include many, or even any, vegetables. Be mindful, even when selecting vegetarian menu items.

4. Restaurant dining is for special occasions, so why not splurge a bit?

Decades ago, restaurant dining was, indeed, reserved for special occasions. But for many people today, restaurant dining is the norm, not the exception. Therefore, most people wouldn't want to make every restaurant occasion an opportunity to splurge.

5. A heart next to a menu item indicates a low-calorie selection.

Sometimes, perhaps, but not necessarily. The heart may have been placed there because the dish contains heart-healthy olive oil, lacks preservatives, contains omega 3 fatty acids or is vegetarian. The best policy is not to make assumptions. Restaurants that have joined the Healthy Dining program may display the Healthy Dining logo on their Web site or menu. Participating restaurants agree to offer a selection of healthier menu choices, which are reviewed and “approved” by Healthy Dining's dietitians.

6. Fast food restaurants do not have any good selections if you're watching your weight.

You can get some great selections at fast food establishments, including salads, grilled chicken and fish, fruit, yogurt and even whole grains. There are always choices that will meet your calorie and fat budget.

7. It is easy to spot the healthier choices on restaurant menus.

Restaurant menu descriptions are not always complete, so you just do not have all the information required to make an informed choice. A knowledgeable server can be helpful, but diners looking for nutrition information will be best served by checking the Web sites of individual restaurants or visiting HealthyDiningFinder.com for a centralized source of nutrition information for restaurant meals.

About the OAC

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a non profit patient organization dedicated to educating and advocating on behalf of those affected by obesity, morbid obesity and childhood obesity. The OAC distributes balanced and comprehensive patient educational materials and advocacy tools.

The OAC believes that patients should first be educated about obesity and its treatments and also encourages proactive patient advocacy. The OAC focuses its advocacy efforts on helping patients gain access to the treatments for morbid obesity. As a membership organization, the OAC was formed to bring patients together to have a voice with issues affecting their lives and health. To learn more about the OAC, visit www.obesityaction.org or contact us at (800) 717-3117.

OAC Resources

The OAC provides valuable resources for patients, as well as professionals. All OAC resources are complimentary and may be ordered in bulk. To request materials, please contact the OAC National Office at (800) 717-3117 or send an email to info@obesityaction.org.

Newsletters

- *Obesity Action Alert* - the OAC's free monthly electronic newsletter
- *OAC News* - OAC's quarterly education and advocacy newsletter

Brochures/Guides

- *Are you living with Obesity?* Brochure
- *Advocacy Primer: Your Voice Makes a Difference*
- BMI Chart

- OAC Insurance Guide
- State-specific Advocacy Guides
- *Understanding Obesity Series*
 - *Understanding Obesity Brochure*
 - *Understanding Obesity Poster*
 - *Understanding Morbid Obesity Brochure*
 - *Understanding Childhood Obesity Brochure*
 - *Understanding Childhood Obesity Poster*
 - *Understanding Obesity Stigma Brochure*



OAC Membership

The OAC was founded as the "patient voice" in obesity. As a membership organization, the OAC exists to represent the needs and interests of those affected by obesity and provide balanced and comprehensive education and advocacy resources. Membership in the OAC is integral in strengthening the voice of the millions affected by obesity. Various membership levels are available and each is accompanied with several valuable benefits such as:

- Official membership card/certificate
- Annual subscription to *OAC News* – OAC's quarterly educational and advocacy newsletter
- Subscription to *Obesity Action Alert* – monthly e-newsletter distributed on the 1st of each month
- Access to valuable educational resources and tools
- Patient representation through advocacy, in addition to information on advocacy issues concerning patients

Yes! I would like to join the OAC's efforts. I would like to join as a/an:

- Patient/Family Member: \$20
 - Professional Member: \$50
 - Physician Member: \$100
 - Surgeon Member: \$150
 - Institutional Member*: \$500 (*Surgery centers, doctors' offices, weight-loss centers, etc.*)
 - OAC Chairman's Council*: \$1,000 +
- * *These membership levels have exclusive benefits.*

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Payment Information

Enclosed is my check (payable to the OAC) for \$ _____.

Please charge my credit card for my membership fee:

Discover® MasterCard® Visa® Amex®

Credit Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____ Billing Zip Code: _____

Mail to: OAC
4511 North Himes Ave., Ste. 250
Tampa, FL 33614

Or Fax to: (813) 873-7838