



# Dining Out: Successfully Meeting the Challenge

By Staci Stone, RD, CDN

These days, dining out has become the norm rather than the exception. Gone are the days when dining out was a unique event saved for special occasions with the entire family present. With our hectic lifestyle and busy schedules, dining out is sometimes a necessity, and for many it may mean eating out several times per week and for more than one meal in a day. In addition, having an abundance of eateries available, ranging from breakfast carts to fast food chains to high end restaurants, may make

even the most health conscious person feel overwhelmed.

Usually, when we eat out we are consuming a lot of extra calories, mainly from fats and large portions, not to mention the extra sodium. While not always easy, it is possible to stay on track with a healthy eating plan while still enjoying the pleasures of dining out.

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**General Tips for Eating Out:** This list helps individuals make better choices when eating out.

- 1 Plan ahead; try to read the restaurant menu first. The Web site [www.menupages.com](http://www.menupages.com) has many menus available from major cities. Or, call the restaurant ahead and ask them to fax or email you the menu.
- 2 When choosing a restaurant, try to avoid buffets. The multitude of choices will likely cause you to consume extra unwanted calories.
- 3 Don't arrive to the restaurant starving. You will be too tempted to snack on breads, nuts, etc. which will quickly rack up the calories.
- 4 Don't be afraid to ask how something is prepared. Broiled fish is better than fried fish, however if it is broiled in butter then that is not the best choice.
- 5 Request sauces, gravies and dressings on the side. Ask how vegetables are prepared and always order them steamed. For side dishes, ask to double up on vegetables and omit potatoes, rice or french fries.
- 6 Omit high calorie toppings such as sour cream, mayonnaise or tartar sauce. Mustard, tomato sauce and salsa are all lower fat alternatives where appropriate.
- 7 Ask the server to remove the bread basket from the table. Avoid rolls, bagels, croissants and pastries which can add 200-400 calories to your meal. For a sandwich, order it on whole wheat or pita bread.
- 8 Avoid these cooking methods: au gratin, fried, cream sauces or soups, "cream of," breaded, alfredo, battered and parmagiana. Instead, choose healthier preparations: au jus, steamed, poached, grilled, baked, lightly sautéed, barbequed and roasted.
- 9 Be careful of mayonnaise based salads such as potato salad, macaroni salad, cole slaw, etc.
- 10 Don't waste your calories on drinks. Choose water, diet soda, unsweetened iced tea, etc. Monitor your servings of alcohol as well.



**For the Post-Surgical Patient:** Once you have had weight-loss surgery, it is still possible to dine out at your favorite restaurants. It is more challenging during the early post-op period because of individual tolerances. This may be the time to forgo dining out until you tolerate more solid foods. Once you are cleared to dine out more often, feel free to enjoy while remaining mindful of healthy alternatives. The following are some helpful tips:

- 1 Do not arrive to the restaurant starving; therefore, you will avoid eating too quickly. This will decrease the chance of any food getting “stuck.” In addition, by slowing down you will feel fuller faster; hence consume less total calories.
- 2 Order an appetizer for your entrée or order from the children’s menu. When ordering, avoid anything fried or in a heavy cream sauce or gravy.
- 3 Share an entrée with a friend or ask for half your order to be put in a take away bag.
- 4 Ask for a smaller spoon or fork to help slow you down.
- 5 Set your utensil down between bites to control your pace.
- 6 Avoid bread, rolls or buns as you will fill up on unwanted, nutrient poor calories.
- 7 Remember to chew well. This would be a good time to be a good listener so you can give yourself time to chew.
- 8 Make sure the food that you are ordering is moist enough. This would be a good time to order foods, “au jus” or in a red sauce or with a little olive oil and garlic.
- 9 Focus on choosing lean meats and vegetables. Good choices of lean proteins are ground beef, turkey, or fish such as flounder, halibut, skate and cod. Moist chicken and tofu are also good options.
- 10 Share dessert or choose sorbets or fresh fruit. Better yet, skip dessert and just enjoy a tea or coffee.

In conclusion, you have made an important life changing step toward a healthier future. While we know cooking at home is the preferable choice when watching fat and calories, there are ways to fit in restaurant dining as well. If you know that you are going out to eat one evening, try to be extra cautious during that day. Cut back on your portions, do some extra exercise. Moderation is key; however, you don’t want to look back at your meal or your dining experience with guilt. Planning ahead can help you enjoy your dining experience without sabotag-

ing your diet control and healthy eating habits. Planning ahead also enables individuals to know what their options are before arriving.

**About the Author:**

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# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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