

Can You Eat Healthy Fast Food?



By Vicki Bovee, MS, RD, LD, and Chef Dave Fouts

Speed and Convenience - The top two reasons people drive-thru fast food restaurants. So, how do you keep your busy schedule and not sacrifice healthy food choices?

We've all done it. We run to a drive-thru to pick up a quick meal. What else can you do that requires so little calorie expenditure in return for high calorie consumption? It's no mystery why people use the drive-thru. All that is needed is to push a button to lower the window, hand over a couple of dollars for a value meal, and in return you get a tasty meal to fill you up and it requires no preparation or clean-up.

According to a USDA report, Americans have increased the amount of their total

food expenditure on meals away from home from 34 percent in 1972 to almost half in 2006. In those dollars spent on food away from home, fast food dollars have increased from 21 percent to 38 percent. It is estimated that one in four Americans visit a fast food restaurant daily.

Why Fast Food?

Why are so many of us eating fast food even though most of us know that the meals are high in calories, fat and

sodium? Researchers at the University of Minnesota interviewed nearly 600 people who ate regularly at fast food restaurants. The results will come as no surprise with speed and convenience the top two responses.

Of those interviewed, 92 percent stated eating fast food because they're quick. More than 80 percent said they are easy to get to. You can find a fast food restaurant with no problem since they are just about on every corner. Only 20 percent felt there were many nutritious

foods to choose from. Bottom line, we know we're not making healthy food choices, but time and convenience are more important to us.

Menu Labeling

Several U.S. states and cities have passed menu labeling policies that require nutrition information to be provided to consumers that is easy to find and easy to read. When calorie content is posted on the menu rather than in a nutrition pamphlet that may not be easily accessible, many consumers are making lower calorie choices.

The problem is for most of the country, consumers have to ask for the information and it may or may not be available. The fast food chains have nutrition information listed on their Web sites, but that requires the consumer to search out the site for information. If the number one reason we are eating fast food is because it is quick, how many people will take to the Internet to find the numbers they are looking for?

Resources to Help You

There are several Web sites that can help you select a restaurant in your area that will offer healthier choices. **Healthydiningfinder.com** and **Goodfoodnearyou.com** allow you to select restaurants in your area displaying their suggested menu items, with or without special requests. You can make healthier choices and enjoy your occasional fast food meal.

About the Authors:

Chef Dave Fouts is known as the world's premier culinary expert for weight-loss surgery patients. Chef Dave can be found speaking around the country. Chef Dave is a member of the OAC Advisory Board.

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To view the references used in this article, please see the Web version located on the OAC Web site.

Tips for Eating Healthier at Fast Food Restaurants



*Note: All nutrition information was obtained from the various companies' Web site nutrition facts.

Read the Menu Carefully before Ordering. Avoid deep fried or breaded items. Crispy means extra fat so look for grilled items.

McDonald's®	Calories	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Sodium (mg)
Crispy Chicken Sandwich	470	18	23	53	1160
Grilled Chicken Sandwich	380	11	27	44	1040
Chicken Fajita	109	5	14	24	560

Choose a Smaller Size Portion. No more super sizing! Even though it may cost less for foods on the dollar menu, they come with a higher calorie price tag. Even restaurant chains that advertise healthier foods still offer portions that are large enough to provide 600 to 800 calories per item.

	Calories	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Sodium (mg)
Burger King					
Double Whopper®	920	58	48	51	1090
Whopper Junior®	340	20	14	28	530
Hamburger	260	11	14	27	520
Jack in the Box					
Large French Fry	639	27	9	89	1190
Small French Fry	300	13	4	42	561
Taco Bell					
Ranchero Chicken Soft Taco	270	14	14	21	840
Fresco Ranchero Chicken Soft Taco	170	4	12	22	740

Eliminate the High Calorie Add-ons. Cheese, bacon, mayo, regular fat salad dressings and dipping sauces add a lot of extra calories because they are high in fat. Ask for sandwiches without the mayo or sauce and add catsup or mustard to replace it. Salads with grilled meats are usually a good choice but make sure to ask for reduced fat or light dressing.

Wendy's®	Calories	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Sodium (mg)
Mandarin Chicken® Salad with Oriental Sesame Dressing	550	25.5	31	49	1250
Mandarin Chicken® Salad with Fat Free French Dressing	450	15.5	30	47	1060

Choose Healthier Side Dishes. Most fast food restaurants offer side salads, fruit or yogurt. Pick these instead of the high fat fried sides.

McDonald's®	Calories	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Sodium (mg)
Medium French Fries	380	19	4	48	270
Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait	160	2	4	31	85

Choose Low Calorie Beverages. Avoid the shakes, blended drinks, soda, or designer coffee drinks. All are high in calories from added fat and/or sugar. Choose water, low-fat milk, iced tea or diet soda instead.

	Calories	Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Sodium (mg)
1 cup 1% Milk	100	2.5	8	12	125
Small Vanilla Shake	420	10	13	72	140
Medium Cola	200	0	0	56	5
Small Lemonade	200	0	0	54	21

Pay Attention to What You are Eating. You may be in a hurry, but resist the temptation to eat in your car. For one, it's not safe to be eating and driving with one hand. Take your meal back home, to the office, or make it a picnic. Slow down your eating and taste your food.

Limit Your Fast Food Meals. These are not places for frequent dining. The average amount of calories for a fast food meal ranges from 1500 to 1800 calories. This amount of calories is more than half

of most people's caloric needs for the entire day, not to mention the excessive sodium found in these foods.

Do some planning ahead. This may mean packing your lunch or taking a snack with you. If you are able to do so, look up the nutrition information on the company's Web site. Some of them are easier to read and navigate than others, but the information is available. Some of them give you the option to personalize your menu item or build your meal.



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.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



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LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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