



Be smart, informed when eating out

I'm trying to lose weight, but it's hard when we eat out. Any tips?

Join the club. It can be extremely difficult to guess how many calories you're consuming when eating out. Unless the restaurant has a brochure of nutrition information or indicates on its menu what the healthiest choices might be, it can be a challenge to enjoy your meal and know with certainty that you're not totally breaking the calorie bank.

In fact, a recent poll of 523 Californians showed just how difficult it can be. The poll, commissioned by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, asked respondents to identify nutrition-related information — fewest calories, least salt, most fat or the most calories -- among choices at four popular restaurant chains. Not one respondent answered all four questions correctly.

For example, one question asked which of these four options at McDonald's had the most calories: two Big Macs, two Egg McMuffins, one large chocolate shake, or four regular hamburgers? The correct answer — the chocolate shake — was given by only 11 percent of the respondents.

To be fair, McDonald's 32-ounce Triple-Thick Chocolate Shake has only 30 more calories than two Big Macs (1,110 compared with 1,080), and 53 percent of the respondents chose Big Macs as the highest calorie option. But still, 68 percent of the re-

spondents got every question wrong. (Try your luck on the other questions, online at <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/menulabelingquiz.php>.)

But the results do reveal consumers' hunger for nutrition information when eating out. And the reason is obvious: According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, households spent 46 percent of their total food dollar in restaurants in 2001, compared with 34 percent in 1972. Obesity rates have also climbed in those years.

Until that happens, dietitians advise reviewing nutrition information, when it's available, before making your food choices when eating out. In addition:

- Stay away from fried foods, including chicken, fish and french fries. Choose grilled, baked or broiled foods instead, and request they be made and served light on the butter or oil.
- Order chocolate milk instead of a chocolate shake, or choose water or a calorie-free beverage instead.
- Don't assume a salad is always your best choice. Watch out for high-calorie dressings, cheese, croutons and other high-calorie additions.

For ideas for healthier fast-food choices, see the Ohio State University Extension fact sheet, "Life in the Fast Food Lane," online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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