



Choose healthful fast-food options

As I chauffeur the kids to and from summer activities, I tend to eat more fast food than usual. Any tips to make my choices more healthful?

Absolutely. Despite popular opinion, fast food doesn't always have to be high-fat, high-calorie and high-guilt.

The best guideline is to look up nutrition information about your usual choices at your favorite fast-food restaurants. All of the major fast-food chains have that information online on their official Web sites, and they often have that information posted in the restaurant and available in a brochure you can take home with you.

You can also find generalized information about nearly 150 fast-food items in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database, online at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>. Just put the words "fast food" in the site's keyword search engine and then choose which item you're interested in.

In the meantime, you can use these general guidelines to make your fast-food meals as healthful as possible:

- Choose smaller sandwiches, and say "no" to cheese, special sauces or spreads. Also, beware of added fat and calories from mayonnaise or bacon on the sandwich. Instead, ask for extra lettuce, tomatoes, pickles and onions.

- Avoid breaded and fried chicken, fish or other sandwich options. Opt for grilled or broiled instead.

- For a side dish, choose fruit, when

available, or a side salad instead of french fries or other high-calorie side. Entree salads are also often good choices instead of sandwiches, but it's best to double-check the calories in them. You might be surprised. Always ask for fat-free or reduced-calorie dressings for your salad.

- Save money and calories by asking for ice water instead of a high-sugar beverage. Or, spend the money and save the calories by ordering a diet soft drink, low-cal lemonade or unsweetened iced tea. Yet another healthful option is to get a calcium boost by ordering a carton of milk as your beverage.

It's not hard to make smart choices at most fast-food restaurants. But, as you know, it can be even easier to make lousy choices. In fact, ordering a large sandwich with cheese, bacon, sauce or other high-calorie add-ons, an order of fries and a large high-sugar beverage could easily add up to (or exceed) the total number of calories you should be consuming in an entire day.

While it's perfectly OK to indulge on rare occasions, the health consequences can add up if you make the same poor choices over and over again. If you're a frequent fast-food patron, do yourself a favor and look up the nutrition information of your choices — and opt for healthful choices most of the time.

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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