

Eating Out

By now we all know the importance of eating well. But how are you supposed to do so when your schedule is so demanding that you're hardly ever at home? Read this article to find out how people make healthy food choices while eating out.

If I Eat Well at Home, What's Wrong With Splurging When I Eat Out?

A slice of pizza once in a while won't do you any harm. What's important is a person's average food intake over a few days, not just in a single meal. So if you eat a less-than-healthy meal once in a while, try to balance it with healthier foods the rest of that day and week.

But if pizza (or any fast food) is all you eat, that can lead to problems. The most obvious health threat of eating too much fast food is weight gain — or even obesity. Overweight and obese teens are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other health problems.

But weight gain isn't the only problem. Too much fast food can drag a person's body down in other ways. Because the food we eat affects all aspects of how the body functions, eating the right (or wrong) foods can influence any number of things, including:

mental functioning

emotional well-being

energy

strength

weight

future health

Eating on the Go

It's actually easier than you think to make good choices at a fast-food restaurant, the mall, or even the school cafeteria. Most cafeterias and fast-food places offer healthy choices that are also tasty, like grilled chicken or salads. Be mindful of portion sizes and high fat add-ons, like dressings, sauces or cheese.

Here are some pointers to remember that can help you make wise choices when eating out:

Go for balance. Choose meals that contain a balance of lean proteins (like fish, chicken, or beans if you're a vegetarian), fruits and vegetables (fries and potato chips don't qualify as veggies!), and whole-grain breads. That's why a turkey sandwich on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato is a better choice than a cheeseburger on a white bun.

Watch portion sizes. The portion sizes of American foods have increased over the past few decades so that we are now eating way more than we need. The average size of a hamburger in the 1950s was just 1.5 ounces, compared with today's hamburgers, which weigh in at 8 ounces or more.

Drink water or low-fat milk. Regular sodas, juices, and energy drinks usually contain "empty" calories that you don't need — not to mention other stuff, like caffeine.

Here are some more suggestions to keep in mind when you're eating away from home:

At a Restaurant

Most restaurant portions are way larger than the average serving of food at home. Ask for half portions, share an entrée with a friend, or take half of your dish home.

Here are some other restaurant survival tips:

Ask for sauces and salad dressings on the side and use them sparingly.

Use salsa and mustard instead of mayonnaise or oil.

Ask for olive or canola oil instead of butter, margarine, or shortening and remember that butter is actually better than margarine.

Use nonfat or lowfat milk instead of whole milk or cream.

Order baked, broiled, or grilled (not fried) lean meats including turkey, chicken, seafood, or sirloin steak.

Salads and vegetables make healthier side dishes than french fries. Use a small amount of sour cream instead of butter if you order a baked potato.

Choose fresh fruit instead of sugary, high-fat desserts.

Stay away from artificial sweeteners. They may have no calories - but your body is tricked into craving sweets even more - plus there are enormous health problems associated with ALL artificial sweeteners. One sweetener you can use is called Stevia. It is an herb - is 300 times sweeter than sugar - has no calories and is actually good for you. You can get it at any health food store in little packets or in larger sizes to use at home.

At the Mall or Fast-Food Place

It's tempting to pig out while shopping, but with a little planning, it's easy to eat healthy foods at the mall. Here are some choices:

a single slice of veggie pizza

grilled, not fried, sandwiches (for example, a grilled chicken breast sandwich)

deli sandwiches on whole-grain bread

a small hamburger

a bean burrito

a baked potato - be careful about eating too many potato items - it can raise your blood sugar.

a side salad

frozen yogurt

Choose the smaller sizes, especially when it comes to drinks and snacks if you have a craving for something unhealthy, try sharing the food you crave with a friend.

If you aren't able to be home schooled and must go to a modern school building you need to have an eating plan.

The suggestions for eating in a restaurant and at the mall apply to cafeteria food as well. Add vegetables and fruit whenever possible, and opt for leaner, lighter items. Choose sandwiches on whole-grain bread or a plain hamburger over fried foods or pizza. Go easy on the high-fat, low-nutrition items, such as mayonnaise and heavy salad dressings.

You might want to consider packing your own lunch occasionally. Here are some lunch items that pack a healthy punch:

Sandwiches with lean meats or fish, like turkey, chicken, tuna (made with low-fat mayo), lean ham, or lean roast beef. For variety, try other sources of protein, like peanut butter, hummus, or meatless chili.

low-fat or nonfat milk, yogurt, or cheese

any fruit that's in season

raw baby carrots, green and red pepper strips, tomatoes, or vegetable juice

whole-grain breads, pita, bagels, or crackers

It can be easy to eat well, even on the run. If you develop the skills to make healthy choices now, your body will thank you later. And the good news is you don't have to eat perfectly all the time. It's OK to splurge every once in a while, as long as your food choices are generally good.