

## Surviving in a Fast Food Nation

One out of three meals is eaten outside the home, and for most people this means fast food. Although quick and cheap, these meals can add up to some serious calories. You can eat healthier at fast food restaurants with these guidelines.

### Words to Avoid

Fast food restaurants use many words to describe food items. These words often point to foods to avoid.

- Crispy, crunchy, breaded
- Cheesy, melty
- Super, ultimate, thick
- Loaded, deluxe
- Double, triple
- Creamy
- Special sauce

### Foods to Avoid

Don't always count on the words to be an indicator of what is or is not healthy. Here are some basic foods to avoid.

- Fried foods (chicken, fish, onion rings)
- Mayonnaise or mayonnaise-based sauces and spreads
- Regular sodas, sweetened tea, artificial fruit drinks (fruit punch)
- Alfredo or white sauces
- Sandwiches on croissants or biscuits
- Pastries, including baked items and fried pies
- Supersized items and value or combo meals
- Items with bacon and sausage
- Full fat dressings

### Healthier Options

These options will help reduce the fat, calories, and sugar content in fast food purchases.

- Baked, broiled, or grilled foods
- Chicken or fish
- Junior sizes
- Low-fat or fat-free dressings
- Whole wheat bread and pasta
- Fruit and yogurt cups
- Tomato sauce on pasta
- Baked potato
- Broth-based soups
- Water, unsweetened tea, light lemonade, diet soft drinks, low-fat milk
- Small soft serve ice cream in a cup



## Helpful Tips

- Usually menu items displayed on a poster or a billboard (unless advertised as low-fat) will be high in fat.
- Ask for low-calorie side orders such as a salad, baked potato, or fruit.
- If salad dressing is not low-fat, only use half of the packet.
- Use a paper napkin to blot the visible grease off of pizza and other foods.
- Order items without the cheese to cut down on the fat and calories.
- “Dry” means no butter or sauce on an item. For example, dry breadsticks will just be toasted and have no butter sauce on top.
- Order from a light menu when possible.
- Order from the kid’s menu. This will cut down on the calories and cost.
- Take your sandwich home and add healthier side items like oven baked fries, baked chips, or fruit.

## Convenience Store

Buying foods at convenience stores can also lead to excess calories, fat, sugar, and cost. Be “in the know.”

- Buy food with a nutrition label so you can get the facts.
- Get items that will last for more than one meal, such as loaves of bread, peanut butter, cereal, and milk in gallon jugs.
- Pick baked or low-fat snack foods.
- Choose diet or unsweetened drinks, water, or low-fat milk.

## Portion Control

Portion sizes have increased in the past ten years. Here are some tips for eating healthy portions.

- Use smaller plates, bowls and cups.
- Don’t go back for seconds.
- Split a meal with a friend.
- Don’t eat out of a bag or box.
- Take half of the meal home with you.
- Order the smallest item. Even a smaller drink can have many fewer calories than larger drinks.
- Don’t eat in front of the TV.

### References:

The Learning Seed. (2005) *Fast Food Survival Guide*

Prepared to accompany “What’s in Your Sandwich” display

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