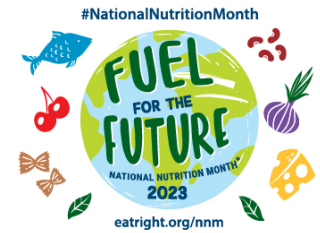# Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Smart Tips for Reading Menus

Ordering out may be a treat after a busy week or a fun way to mark a celebration. However, making the right choices when eating out can also be a challenge.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind to help you decipher the menu the next time you order out.

Nutrition Information

Many restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops and quick service vendors are required to provide nutrition information about their foods and beverages right on the menu.

Calories

The amount of calories for foods that are regularly offered should be listed next to items on menus, order boards or next to the food being served on buffet lines.

Salt, Fat, Carbohydrates and More

The information posted on the menu is usually limited to calories but sometimes a restaurant may list other nutrients to show that the food is low in fat or high in protein.

Additional nutrition information must also be available on request for most foods served at these restaurants. This includes information about the amount of nutrients, such as sodium, saturated fat and dietary fiber.

If you like to plan ahead, many restaurants also have nutrition information available online, which can help you select healthier options before you arrive and reduce pressure you may feel to order quickly.

Have a Backup Strategy

Restaurants aren't required to have nutrition information available if they have fewer than 20 locations. There are also a few exceptions for items such as daily specials, custom orders or condiments.

If nutrition information isn't available for an item, consider the following tips when you're deciding what to order.

Limit items that are fried or served in sauces that are high in calories and saturated fat. Some terms to be mindful of include:

- Crunchy, Crispy, Battered and Breaded

- Creamy, Cheesy, Alfredo

Items that are often lower in calories and may be more healthful options include terms, such as:

- Baked, Grilled, Roasted, Steamed

- Al Fresco, Marinara

Make the Right Choices for You

Nutrition needs vary from person to person. Choose the foods that fit your health needs, eating style and preferences.

These tips may be helpful when trying to make the best choices for you and your family:

- Consider the calorie information when deciding between different dishes and what to order.

- Remember that side dishes add calories too; consider steamed vegetables or fruit as an option, when available.

- Save half your meal for later or ask for a dessert to be split for a more appropriate portion size when servings are large or high in calories.

- Rethink your drink. Calories from beverages can add up quickly, especially if there are free refills. Choose healthier options like water or low-fat or fat-free milk or drinks that are calorie-free, such as unsweetened coffee or tea.

- Ask for sauces and dressing on the side to help control how much actually goes on your food.

Find Your Healthy Eating Routine

Everyone has their own, individual nutrition needs. Find your healthy eating routine by using recommendations from MyPlate.

Choose foods and beverages with less saturated fat, sodium and added sugars. Focus on variety, amount and nutrition when choosing what to eat and drink. And, start with small changes to build your healthy eating routine now and into the future.

MyPlate can help you find a healthy eating routine that meets your needs.

If you have special nutrition needs, consult a registered dietitian nutritionist for personalized nutrition advice.

Find more healthy eating tips at:

www.eatright.org
www.kidseatright.org

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information, visit www.eatright.org.

eat right® Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

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