

New Rules Requiring Restaurants to Post Calorie Content of Foods

You may be a person who likes to eat out often. While eating out can be fun, there are lots of yummy foods that contain lots of calories.

One way to avoid consuming a lot of calories when eating out is to be aware of exactly how many calories are in the foods before you eat them.

Beginning May 5, 2017, it will be easier for consumers to figure out how many calories that are eating when eating out. That is when the Food and Drug Administration will officially require restaurants with 20 or more locations to post nutritional information facts for their regular menu items including food and beverages.

While some food establishments already provide calorie counts on their menus, the new regulation will require all impacted restaurants nationwide to provide this information.

The new rules, which are a part of the Affordable Care Act, will also require impacted restaurants to post statements alerting consumers that other nutrition information is available on request, including information on total calories, calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, fiber, sugars and protein for their regular menus.

This is significant considering that 92 percent of 364 measured restaurant meals from both large-chain and non-chain restaurants exceed the recommended calorie requirements for a single meal, according to a recent study published in the Journal of American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

The study also found that restaurants routinely serve meals that contain more calories that should be consumed in a single meal and often in an entire day. That is even before the beverage or dessert is included in the meal.

There are some steps that you can take to avoid overeating when eating out. These tips are from USDA's ChooseMyPlate.gov website.

- Choose water, unsweetened tea, sugar free sodas, fat-free milk and other beverages without added sugar.
- Begin your meal with a salad packed with vegetables to help you feel satisfied sooner. Ask for salad dressing on the side and use only a small amount.
- Share a main entrée or only eat half of your meal.
- Order a side dish or an appetizer-sized portion instead of a regular sized entrée. They usually have smaller plates or smaller amounts. Some places offer child's plate or smaller plates for an option.
- Pack fruit, sliced vegetables, low-fat string cheese or unsalted nuts to eat during road trips or long commutes. No need to stop for other food when these snacks are ready to eat.

- Fill your plate with vegetables and fruit. Stir-fries, kabobs or vegetarian menu items usually have more vegetables. Select fruits as a side dish or dessert.
- Compare the calories, fat, and sodium. Look for items that are lower in calories, saturated fat and sodium.
- Have an item from the menu and avoid “all-you-can-eat” buffets or meals.
- Select items that are steamed, grilled or broiled that have fewer calories than those that are fried or cooked in butter.
- Request 100 percent whole-wheat breads, rolls, and pasta when choosing sandwiches, burgers or main dishes.
- Consider taking leftovers home if you will be going home soon and can refrigerate them.

Source: Ohio State Extension, U.S.D.A. and FDA.