

Denita Young
County Extension Agent -FCS
Rains County

Eating Out—Challenging At Best!

Whether you have diabetes or are just trying to maintain your weight, meal management is the same—whether for everyday meals or special occasion or holidays. The most important thing to remember is that you may have to put a little more effort into planning your schedule and meals than a person without diabetes does, but you can enjoy the season just as much. As a result, we may be eating less healthful foods nowadays. Foods eaten in restaurants and fast-food places are generally higher in fat, saturated fat and calories, and lower in fiber and calcium. It's not too difficult to choose healthful items from restaurants. What you must be willing to do is to permanently give up high-fat choices in favor of more healthful foods. To help develop this fine art of healthier eating out, here are some basic rules of the road to success:

Keep up with how often you eat out. Why? Because when eating away from home, you lose control over how much salt, butter, oil and mayonnaise you use. Many people eat out five or more times a week, which can lead to an excess of fat and calories if you do not learn to order healthfully. When health is a concern, such as for those of us who have diabetes, we need to establish a frequency of eating out that fits our lifestyles and our health needs.

Select restaurants with care. Choose establishments that provide a flexible menu. Consider what is served, the variety of choices and the way the food is prepared. Fortunately, many restaurants and fast food establishments have recognized that Americans are more health conscious than they were a few years ago. For this reason, fresh salads, salad bars, baked potatoes, soups, milk and sugar-free sodas have been added to most restaurants' standard menu. These welcome additions make it possible for you to order a meal that is low in calories, sodium and fat, and rich in fiber, vitamins and minerals.

How can you remain on your meal plan even when you eat away from home? Never starve before going to eat; avoid over-ordering; and if you know the menu, plan before arriving so you are not tempted by seeing all the less healthful choices on the menu. Some people even bring dishes that will be appropriate for their meal plan or carry food to supplement the menu.

Make savvy menu choices. Ask the server for information about preparation methods, serving sizes and options for special requests. Order foods that will satisfy both your taste buds and your health needs. Avoid starving before you go so that you don't over-order. Keep fat grams in check. When choosing a restaurant, carefully consider your choices, getting input from others eating with you. Beware of excess fat and calories that can be added to

healthful vegetables. Learn where fat creeps into restaurant selections — from appetizers to desserts. We have already seen the excess in calories that fat provides. Be a good fat detective.

Order food the way you want it. Restaurants that neither welcome nor honor your special requests should be replaced with more accommodating ones. Always be courteous when making special requests, and ask for help from the wait staff.

Use portion control. To keep your portion sizes in check, visualize what a proper serving is like. Remember the ordinary objects that can help us estimate how much food to eat — a tennis ball, cassette tape, computer mouse, hockey puck, etc. There are other restaurant strategies as well. Ask for a container to use to take home excess food. Or split an order with a friend. Look for menu words denoting small, such as lunch, petite, regular, single and kid. You can also order an appetizer to eat as the main course.

Eating out in traditional or fast-food restaurants require special consideration. It is very easy to consume large amounts of calories from foods served at fast-food operations. The foods there are usually concentrated sources of carbohydrates and fats. However, you can eat at any restaurant if you choose foods that fit your meal pattern. Several guides are available to assist you with making wise selections at restaurants and fast food establishments. Two of these guides are: The CalorieKing Calorie, Fat & Carbohydrate Counter 2006 Edition <http://www.calorieking.com/shop/11-The-CalorieKing-Calorie-Fat-Carbohydrate-Counter-2006->

<http://www.fastfoodfacts.com/contact.asp>

Prepared or presented by Extension Agents Family Nutrition
Sciences by Mary K. Bielamowicz, Ph.D., M.S., R.D., L.D., C.F.C.S., Regents
Fellow, Professor and Extension Nutrition Specialist, Texas Cooperative
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