

SURVIVING THE FAST-FOOD LANE

Fast-food restaurants serve about half of all meals eaten away from home. Their success shows they offer some things we want, such as quick service, convenience, and low cost. But they also offer some things we don't want, too.

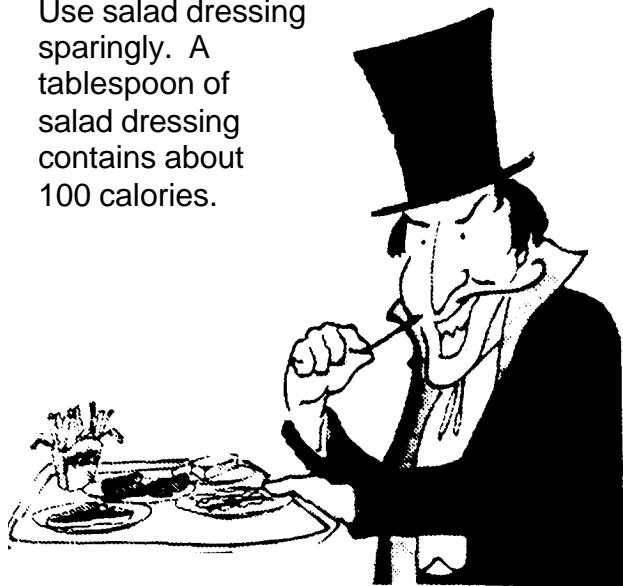
Fast-food meals typically are low in fiber and vitamins C and A, and are heavy on fat and sodium. More importantly, they're loaded with calories that threaten the waistline. For example, a burger, fries, and shake provide 900 to 1300 calories. If you need to lose weight, or should cut down on fat or salt, approach your friendly fast-food place with caution. Follow these general tips when eating at fast-food restaurants.



To reduce your calorie and fat intake:

- Fast-food breakfasts tend to be higher in fat, calories, and cholesterol than other meals. Choose cereal with low fat milk; fruit or juice; plain toast, English muffin, fruit muffin, or bagel. Plain pancakes are much lower in fat and cholesterol than breakfast sandwiches. Just remember not to add butter, and go lightly on the maple syrup.
- Almost all fast-food breakfast sandwiches are high in fat and sodium. If you do order one of the sandwiches that includes meat, the best choice would be one made with Canadian bacon, the leanest of all breakfast meats. Sausage sandwiches are the highest in fat and calories.
- The baked potato starts out as a low fat food. However, when you add cheese, bacon, and the works, the calories double and the fat value skyrockets. A better bet is to add a small amount of margarine plus vegetables from the salad bar, such as chopped green onion and perhaps a tablespoon of shredded cheese.
- “All-you-can-eat” buffet bars almost guarantee disaster. Avoid any situation that encourages “eating to get your money’s worth.”
- Choose broiled, baked, or grilled chicken or fish when possible. If fried is the only choice on the menu, remove the breading or skin.
- Eating deep-fried chicken or fish with batter or breading offers no reduced calorie or reduced fat advantage over red meat. In fact, a plain roast beef sandwich has half the fat of a fried breast of chicken or fried fish sandwich. Extra crispy fried chicken has more calories and fat than regular fried chicken.
- Mashed potatoes (even with a small amount of gravy) are much lower in fat and calories than are french fries. And onion rings have even more fat and calories than do french fries.
- Order hamburgers without cheese and special sauce to save on calories and fat. A quarter pound hamburger has 100 fewer calories and about one-third less fat than the same item with cheese. Omit the special sauce and you save even more calories.

- Use small amounts of ketchup and mustard as condiments. They are lower in calories and fat than are mayonnaise and mayonnaise-based sauces. But even ketchup and mustard must be used in moderation if you're watching your sodium intake.
- Salad bars are a healthy option offered at many fast-food restaurants. Choose lettuce or other greens, and stick with the plain fresh fruits and vegetables. To cut down on calories and fat,
- Avoid mayonnaise-based items such as potato salad, macaroni salad, and pasta salad. Items such as bacon bits and cheese can quickly add calories and fat. Use salad dressing sparingly. A tablespoon of salad dressing contains about 100 calories.



- Limit yourself to no more than two tablespoons of regular dressing. Even better, choose fat free dressing, if it's offered.
- Don't "super-size" it. Ordering the extra large version of a menu item can more than triple the calories for that food.

- Soft ice cream has the lowest calories and fat of most desserts generally available on fast-food menus. A plain soft ice cream cone has around 190 calories and 5 grams of fat. Cookies and pies have about 100 calories more, and a much higher percentage of their calories come from fat.
- Request low fat or skim milk.
- Ask what kind of fat is used to fry foods at the restaurant. Avoid items that have been fried in beef fat, lard, coconut oil, or palm oil.

To reduce your sodium intake:

- Order sandwiches without the pickle (93 mg sodium). Use small amounts of mustard (180 mg per tablespoon) and catsup (180 mg per tablespoon). Order sandwiches without cheese, which contains 200 to 400 mg of sodium per slice.
- Skip the bacon bits, pickled vegetables, cheese, olives, and croutons at the salad bar. Use oil and vinegar in place of high sodium salad dressings.
- Order pizza with vegetables such as mushrooms, green peppers, and onions. Skip the pepperoni, sausage, and ham, and save yourself a lot of fat calories in addition to sodium.
- Avoid chili, cheese sauce, soup, and other sauces at hot food bars. They're usually loaded with sodium.