

(Es)chewing the Fat

Dining out needn't derail your diet

> Most of us find it easiest to maintain a healthy diet when we dine at home, where we have some control over what we eat, how it's prepared and the size of our portions.

But in our time-crunched world, eating out has become the new reality. On average, Americans eat 4.2 meals per week in a commercial setting, according to the National Restaurant Association. For men ages 18 to 34, that figure is closer to six meals a week.

The good news? With a little thought (and advance planning) it is possible to enjoy a fast food lunch or restaurant dinner several times a week without packing on extra pounds. Some tips for what to order—and avoid:

Fast Food: Hold the Fat

We've all been conditioned to look to chicken or fish as a healthier substitute for beef. But when it comes to fast food sandwiches, you might want to think



again. Consider that a double cheeseburger at Burger King is 370 calories (18 grams of fat), while a TENDERCRISP chicken sandwich comes in at a whopping 750 calories—with 45 grams of fat. Almost as bad is the Alaskan Fish Sandwich (590 calories; 31 grams of fat). Holding the mayo or

FORTUNATELY, IT'S EASIER THAN EVER THESE DAYS TO GET A HANDLE ON THE NUTRITIONAL STATS OF FOOD SERVED BY RESTAURANT CHAINS.

tartar sauce can cut these fat counts by more than half and shave about 200 calories off each sandwich.

But a better strategy still is to avoid any sandwich fillers that are breaded and fried. Instead, go for the grilled and eschew the goopy toppings. Without mayonnaise, BK's TENDERGRILL chicken sandwich is just 360 calories with 6 grams of fat. McDonald's offers a similar option, with its Premium Grilled Chicken Classic Sandwich. And don't turn your back on the beef. A regular roast beef sandwich at Arby's, for instance, can sate your appetite while staying well within healthy calorie limits, at 320 calories and 14 grams of fat.



Now That's Italian!

Is there anyone left in the world who doesn't recognize Fettucine Alfredo (aka "heart attack on a plate") as the ultimate fat and calorie buster? So first things first: Run from anything with "Alfredo" in the title—including Olive Garden's 1,440-calorie Chicken Alfredo dinner, with its artery-clogging 82 grams of fat.

Also on the list to avoid: Lasagna (the twice-baked dinner version at Macaroni Grill carries a calorie count of 1,360, with 80 grams of fat) and Chicken Parmesan (1,490 calories and 68 grams of fat at Macaroni Grill).

Fortunately, there are some tasty Italian dishes that aren't smothered in cream, or bubbling with cheese. "Primavera" options, made with lightly sautéed spring vegetables, can be your best friend here. Olive Garden's shrimp primavera dinner, at 730 calories, 12 grams of fat, won't break your nutritional bank for the day.

"Pomodoro" sauce (thicker than marinara, with chunks of tomatoes, garlic and basil sautéed in olive oil) affords another flavorful choice. You can enjoy a satisfying bowl of Spaghetti Pomodoro at Carrabba's and consume 530 calories and just 1.5 grams of fat. Take a similar tack when ordering pizza. A Margherita pizza, with its fresh slices of mozzarella, tomatoes and basil, is a filling but reasonable alternative

(280 calories/slice; 11 grams of fat at Bertucci's) to a pizza loaded with cheese and meat.

Mexican: Go Naked

To borrow a popular catch phrase used by Mexican eateries, it's best to "go naked" when navigating the fixings lines of Mexican casual dining restaurants: Simply skipping the soft flour tortilla on your burrito shaves more than 300 calories off your meal.

Along similar lines, follow your good health instincts by ordering a salad—but don't eat the bowl! Despite its satisfying crunch, a tortilla bowl packs on more than 20 grams of fat and about 350 calories. Much better to order along the lines of the naked Mango Grilled Chicken Salad at Qdoba (with no cheese or sour cream),

which comes in at a heart healthy 280 calories and 10 grams of fat.

Whatever protein you choose (chicken, pork, steak), be sure to bulk up on the numerous veggie options now available at Mexican chains, and opt for brown rice over white rice whenever possible for more fiber. You can dig into a heaping burrito bowl at



Chipotle, for example, with steak, black beans, brown rice, fajita vegetables, fresh tomato salsa, cheese and lettuce, for a reasonable 580 calories and 20 grams of fat.

Plan Ahead

Fortunately, it's easier than ever these days to get a handle on the nutritional stats of food served by restaurant chains. Many already post calorie counts on their food items, and McDonald's jumped on the bandwagon this past fall, in advance of an expected federal mandate for menu-labeling that is expected to go into effect in 2013. Go online before heading out the door (or check the menu or your smartphone while standing in line) to make sure your order isn't a fat and calorie bomb. ■

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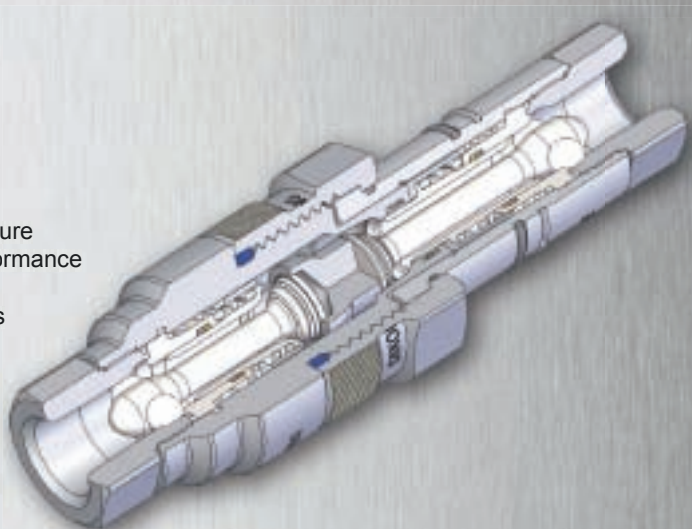
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