

# Menu Magic: 7 Strategies for Dining Out Healthfully

Dining out these days requires savvy navigation of menu minefields that often feature too much fat and too many calories. But according to Hope Warshaw, R.D., author of *Eat Out, Eat Right: The Guide to Healthier Restaurant Eating*, (Surrey Books, 2008), if you make informed choices and control your portions, you can eat out healthfully.

**Be Prepared.** What's the secret? Do your homework, says Warshaw. Many restaurants, especially chains, now have their menu online, so you can check it out even before you leave home. Another option is to visit *HealthyDiningFinder.com* (see "Help Is On the Way," right).

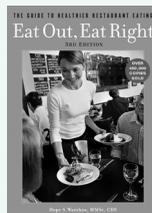
**Ditch the Splurge Mentality.** Over the years, restaurant menus have expanded to include healthful options, but paradoxically there also seem to be even more tempting high-fat choices. So, ideally, decide on your order before walking in the restaurant door and then stick to it. Having a plan of action before hunger hits and before the server starts listing daily specials is the best way to avoid a nutrition disaster, but it also takes the right attitude.

"Many people still treat dining out as a special occasion—an excuse to splurge," says Warshaw, "but eating a restaurant meal (on site or as take-out) (ck) has gone from a once-in-a-blue-moon event to something Americans do six times a week, on average, according to the National Restaurant Association."

Since this means nearly one of every three meals is now eaten away from home, it's easy to see why the splurge mentality just doesn't work. Rather, you need to view dining out as an opportunity to eat a healthful meal. If you can do that, you'll be less tempted to order large fries or a grande supreme.

## *Eat Out, Eat Right: The Guide to Healthier Restaurant Eating, third edition*, by Hope Warshaw, M.M.Sc., R.D. (Surrey Books, 2008)

This comprehensive book is loaded with strategies and tips to healthfully guide you through nearly every popular dining option from Middle Eastern and Indian restaurants to fast food and fine dining, with special sections on beverages. Each chapter provides a nutrition snapshot of the



eating style, a menu profile, lists of green- and red-flag words and sample low-calorie and moderate-calorie meal plans complete with nutrition information. A book you can't afford to dine without.

**HealthyDiningFinder.com**—Partially funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and run by a San Diego-based company staffed by registered dietitians, this website lists healthful menu choices and nutrition information for many eateries. Most of the restaurants listed are chains, but the site is easy to use (simply type in your zip code and price range) and it's free.

To wend your way through the menu maze, *EN* offers 7 simple strategies:

## Strategies for Healthful Dining Out

**Be Positive**—Commit to eating healthfully when you dine out. You may convince yourself restaurant meals "don't count," but they do, and calories add up fast.

**Think Small**—Large restaurant portions are the downfall of many a diner. What to do? Zero in on an appetizer as a meal, ask for a child's or half-size portion, split an entrée with your dining partner or order a full portion but have the waiter immediately box up half to take home.

**Don't Drink Your Calories**—Restaurants are thirsty for sales and the beverage industry aids and abets. Coffee drinks, smoothies, soda and sweetened fruit teas tack on as much as 500 extra calories. Order water, seltzer or unsweetened tea instead.

**Special-Request It**—Don't be skittish about asking for healthful substitutions. For example, at Chinese restaurants, War-

shaw requests that General Tsao's chicken be made with sautéed chicken rather than breaded, deep-fried chicken. Other options: substitute a baked potato for French fries, specify brown rice instead of white, order salad dressing on the side and ask for your sandwich on whole-wheat bread.

**Beware of High-Fat Freebies**—These are the foods that typically greet you at the table, such as bread and butter, fried tortilla chips or crispy Chinese noodles. Ask your server not to put them down, so you won't be tempted into mindless munching while waiting for your order.

**Become a Fat Finder**—On the menu, avoid high-fat ingredients like cheese, butter, oil, creamy sauces and fatty meats like sausage. Items "fried" or "crispy" are red flags. Ask your server for details.

**Take it Home**—Stop eating as soon as you *begin* to feel full, to let your brain catch up. Ask the server to box up what's left, so you won't keep picking at it.

—Diane Welland, M.S., R.D.

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