

# How to Make Healthy Choices while Dining Out

Goals and Objectives of Lesson:

How does your portion size measure up to the recommended? The truth is our portion sizes have increased over the years along with our waistlines! Step one is doing a reality check on what a portion size should really look like. Learn to manage how much you eat and feel the benefits of eating less. Learn tips to navigate while dining out and how to choose healthy menu items.

Participants will learn:

- It's not just what you eat, but how much
- Compare serving sizes of today and those from the past
- Learn the recommended serving sizes
- Dining out challenges – what is a restaurant's serving size
- Tips on healthier dining out

## **A Serving or a Portion?**

Healthy eating includes making healthful food choices, which means knowing what and how much you eat. Do you know the difference between serving and portion sizes? While the terms serving and portion are often used interchangeably, they actually mean different things.

A “serving” is the amount of food recommended in consumer education materials such as MyPlate. A “portion” is the amount of a food you choose to eat at any one time – which may be more or less than a serving.

Here are some everyday comparisons to help you figure out your serving sizes.

- 1 teaspoon of margarine is the size of one dice
- 3 ounces of meat is the size of a deck of cards
- 1 cup of pasta is the size of a baseball
- 1 ½ ounces of cheese is the size of four stacked dice
- ½ cup of fresh fruit is the size of a tennis ball

To overcome portion distortion and to downsize your helpings, try these tips:

- Eat from a plate, not a package, so you know how much you eat
- Use smaller dishes, such as a lunch plate for your dinner, so less looks like more

Once you get a good sense of serving sizes, you can compare them to the portions you eat and make any necessary modifications.

## Helpful and Healthful Dining Out

Eating at a restaurant doesn't have to sabotage a healthy diet. Use smart-eating strategies: Plan ahead, consider the menu, and choose foods carefully to keep you on your plan.

### 1. Preparation

- **Have a plan.** Eat a lighter dinner if you ate a big lunch that day. Or, if you know ahead of time that you're going to a restaurant, cut back on calories during other meals during the day. Knowing menu terms and cooking basics makes ordering easier, especially if you need to control calories. So, look for foods that are steamed, broiled, baked, or grilled,

and limit fried and sauteed items or foods described as “crispy,” “rich” or “au gratin.”

## 2. Choosing a Restaurant

- **Think ahead.** Consider meal options at different restaurants and look for places with a wide range of menu items. Check online menus, if available, for nutrition information ahead of time.

## 3. Ordering

- **Be deliberate when ordering.** Balance your meal by including healthier selections from all the different food groups such as lean meats, low- or non-fat dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Look for freshly made entrée salads that give you a “balance in a bowl.” For example, entrée salads with baked or grilled chicken, low-fat cheese or seafood provide protein along with fiber and other nutrients. If you are counting calories, use a low-fat dressing or ask for it on the side or skip some of the extras such as croutons.

For sandwich toppings, go with low-fat options including lettuce, tomato, and onion; use condiments such as ketchup, mustard or relish and low-fat dressings.

Round out your meal by ordering healthy side dishes, such as a side salad with low-fat dressing, baked potato or fruit. Boost the nutritional value of your baked potato by topping it with vegetables, salsa or chili.

- **Substitute.** Ask for a side salad with low-fat dressing to replace fries in a combination meal. Many restaurants honor requests, so don’t be afraid to be assertive, ask menu questions and make special requests to meet your nutritional needs.
- **Control portions.** Many restaurants serve huge portions, sometimes enough for two or three people. Order menu items that contain fewer calories and eat a smaller portion. Bring leftovers home for another meal. Or, order an appetizer in place of an entrée and add a small salad.

#### 4. Eating

- ***Eat slowly.*** It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you are no longer hungry. Fast eaters are often overeaters, while slow eaters tend to eat less and are still satisfied.

#### 5. Eating Out with Kids

- ***Choose a restaurant that caters to children.*** This will increase the likelihood that a restaurant has a healthy children's menu that includes smaller portion sizes and meals designed to provide ample nourishment for smaller bodies. For new foods, offer a bite or two from your order. Otherwise, let kids order their familiar favorites when they eat out. Pick two or three suitable menu items and then let your child pick one. Substitute healthier sides in place of fries, such as carrots or apple slices, and order plain foods with sauce on the side. Calcium is important at all ages, but especially for growing bones. To get more calcium, opt for low-fat or fat-free white or chocolate milk for a beverage, or add a slice of cheese to their sandwich. Choose dairy-based desserts such as yogurt or a smoothie. Restaurants may be intimidating to people trying to stick to a healthy diet, but with preparation and confidence, you can enjoy your restaurant meal without abandoning healthy eating.

#### **Optional Discussion Activity**

- Group Discussion – How do you feel when you overeat?

## **Resources/References**

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/healthdisp/pdf/tipsheets/Tips-for-Eating-Out.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/healthdisp/pdf/tipsheets/Tips-for-Eating-Out.pdf)

[https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2022-04/TipSheet\\_28\\_DineOutTakeOut.pdf](https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2022-04/TipSheet_28_DineOutTakeOut.pdf)

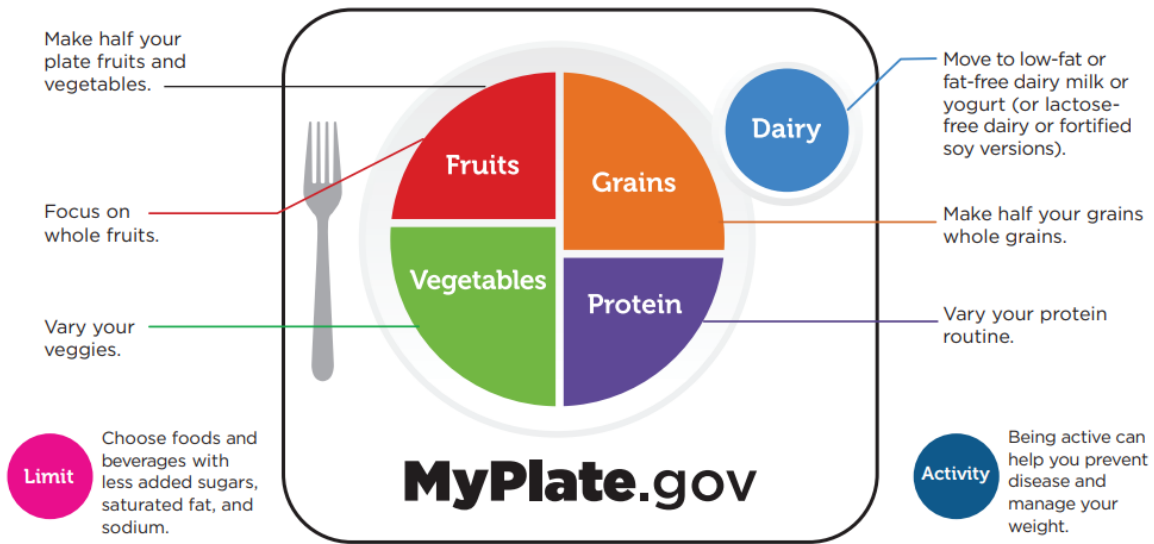
[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

## **Materials**

- 1) Handouts
- 2) Items to indicate proper serving sizes: deck of cards, baseball, dice, tennis ball, glassware from home, music CD
- 3) Optional: 9-inch paper plate to represent MY PLATE

# Start simple with MyPlate

Healthy eating is important at every life stage,  
with benefits that add up over time, bite by bite. Small changes matter.



# Tips For Eating Out

You do not have to give up eating fast foods to eat right.  
Here are some tips on how to make heart healthy choices when eating out.

## General Tips

- Let the restaurant know your dietary needs, so they can suggest ways to meet your needs, if possible.
- Instead of buffets, order healthy choices from the menu.
- On the day you are planning to eat out, eat foods with less sodium in your other meals and snacks. Many meals at restaurants are high in sodium.
- Ask that no salt be added to your meal.
- When eating Asian food, use light soy sauce to season the food.

## Main Dishes

- Choose rotisserie-style chicken rather than fried chicken. Always remove the skin.
- Order pizza with vegetable toppings, such as peppers, mushrooms, or onions. Ask for half the usual amount of cheese.
- Choose grilled, steamed, or baked fish instead of deep-fried fish.
- Leave off all butter, gravy, and sauces.
- Make sure the restaurant does not use monosodium glutamate (MSG) in the dishes. MSG is high in sodium!



## Sandwiches

- Order sandwiches without mayonnaise, tartar sauce, or special sauces. Try mustard or low-fat mayonnaise instead.
- Ask for vegetables to be added to your sandwich.
- Order plain, instead of deluxe hamburgers.
- Order sandwiches made with lean, low-sodium meat.
- Avoid chicken salad and tuna salad. They are usually made with regular mayonnaise and are high in fat.
- Choose grilled, instead of breaded, chicken sandwiches.

## Side Dishes

- Choose a baked potato over french fries.
- Share a small order of french fries instead of eating a large order by yourself.
- Use low-calorie, low-fat salad dressing. Ask that it be served on the side, and use less.
- Order a green vegetable or salad instead of two or more starches.
- Ask for low-fat cheese and low-fat sour cream.



## Beverages

- Choose water, 100% fruit juice, unsweetened iced tea, or fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk rather than a soft drink or a milkshake.
- If you really want to have a soft drink order a small or sugar-free one.



## Desserts

- Order the smallest size of fat-free frozen yogurt, low-fat ice cream, or sherbet instead of cakes, cookies, pies, or other desserts.



**NIH** National Heart, Lung,  
and Blood Institute

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**CHW** COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER  
HEALTH DISPARITIES INITIATIVE

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with MyPlate



## Dine Out/Take Out

Healthy eating is important at every age. Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives. When deciding what to eat or drink, choose options that are full of nutrients and limited in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Start with these tips:



### Decode the menu

Look for choices that are baked, broiled, grilled, poached, steamed, boiled, or roasted to limit extra saturated fat and salt. If you aren't sure, ask how menu items are prepared and/or if they can be prepared a different way.



### Start your meal with veggies

If you start your meal with a salad or eat your vegetables first, you will feel full sooner and ensure that you get valuable vegetable nutrients.



### Split your dish

When ordering food, portions can be very large. Consider sharing a meal with someone else or making two meals out of it by saving half for the next day.



### Look for fruits and veggies

Pick dishes that highlight vegetables like stir-fries, veggie wraps, or kabobs. Select fruit as a side dish or for dessert.



### Plan ahead and compare choices

Before you order takeout or head to a restaurant, see if menu information is available on a website. Look for choices that are lower in calories, sodium, and saturated fat.



### Choose your sauce

Pick sauces made from vegetables like marinara, rather than cream or butter sauces to limit calories from saturated fat. You can ask for them on the side or for the dish to be prepared with less or no sauce.



Go to [MyPlate.gov](https://www.MyPlate.gov) for more information. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

**The benefits of healthy eating  
add up over time, bite by bite.**

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## IEHA Program Lesson Submission

<b>Author(s) Names and Email(s):</b>	Gail Peitzmeier, EdD, RD <a href="mailto:gpeitzme@purdue.edu">gpeitzme@purdue.edu</a>	Molly Marshall, MS,RDN,LD <a href="mailto:marsh119@purdue.edu">marsh119@purdue.edu</a>
<b>County Where Author(s) Work:</b>	Crawford County	Jackson County
<b>Area Where Author(s) Work:</b>	Area 2	
<b>Phone Number of Author(s):</b>	812-338-5466	812-358-6101
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<b>Topic Description:</b> (Information should be researched, educational, approved for use (if you are not the author, seek approval from materials author), and presented in a format that would allow an individual to read, study, and teach to other peers. <b>All copyright issues should be resolved before submission.</b>	<p>How does your portion size measure up to the recommended? The truth is our portion sizes have increased over the years along with our waistlines! Step one is doing a reality check on what a portion size should really look like. Learn to manage how much you eat and feel the benefits of eating less. Learn tips to navigate dining out and how to choose healthy menu items.</p> <p>Participants will learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ It's not just what you eat, but how much</li> <li>➤ Compare serving sizes of today and those from the past</li> <li>➤ Learn the recommended serving sizes</li> <li>➤ Dining out challenges – what is a restaurant's serving size</li> <li>➤ Tips on healthier dining out</li> </ul>	

**Short Goal/Objective  
Statement for Lesson:**

Learn tips to navigate while dining out and how to choose healthy menu items.

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