

MUSC Dietetic Internship Program
25 Courtenay, ART 7100A, MSC 290
Charleston, SC 29425-2900
Ph: (843) 876-4304 Fax: (843) 876-4705
<http://www.musc.edu/dieteticinternship/>

Eat Right ... When Eating Out

By Alison Church, MUSC Dietetic Intern

The theme for this year's National Nutrition Month (March) is "Eat Right..." So let's talk about eating right when eating out. It is no secret that eating healthy while dining out can be quite challenging. In fact, restaurants rarely provide you with the nutritional information for your favorite menu items. As a result, the line distinguishing healthy from unhealthy is often blurred. For example, a salad choice screams "healthy!" But the creamy dressing, croutons, and cheese sprinkles turn the "healthy" claim into a resounding "unhealthy" groan. The listing of nutritional content for food included on restaurant menus, unfortunately, is not required. However, the tips included below can help you make healthy meal choices when eating out:

- **Notice the descriptions on the menu.** Deep-fried, pan-fried, baked, batter-dipped, breaded, creamy, crispy, au gratin, or in cream sauce are descriptive words usually used to describe foods higher in fat, calories, and sodium.
- **Refuse the freebies.** Politely decline the complimentary bread, chips and salsa, or peanuts. Spend your calories on your meal.
- **Watch your portion size.** Restaurants often serve their food on large serving dishes that offer large portions. Sharing a meal or bringing half your meal home is an easy way to control your portions and help control your weight. Or ask for a "doggie bag" when you order so you are reminded to enjoy the rest tomorrow.
- **Select healthy side dishes.** Opt for grilled vegetables as opposed to sides such as French fries, coleslaw, or a loaded baked potato to help reduce calories and fat in your meal. In addition, vegetables are a great source of fiber, which keeps you feeling full for longer.
- **Customize your order.** Don't be afraid to order a menu item without specific items such as cheese, sour cream, or mayonnaise. Restaurants want to satisfy special requests in order to ensure customer satisfaction.
- **Check the website.** Many restaurants are starting to include the nutrition information for their menu items on their websites. If you know the restaurant destination, check out the website beforehand and decide which meal will fit into your calorie allowance. Just make sure to stay with the healthy decision when you are placing your order.

Restaurants menus can be quite extensive. Therefore, as you look over the menu items it is important to recognize healthy options when considering soups, salads, pastas, seafood, or meat. No matter what you're in the mood for, these tips will assist in selecting healthy items.

- **Soup** – Broth-based soups are a better option compared to cream-based soups.
- **Salad** – Ask for the server for your dressing on the side to control your portion and opt for oil and vinegar or a vinaigrette dressing (Italian) instead of a cream-based dressing (Ranch, Thousand Island, Blue Cheese, French).
- **Pasta** – Chose whole-grain pasta if it is available. Select a tomato-based sauce over a cream-based sauce such as Alfredo sauce.
- **Seafood** – Order your seafood baked, broiled, sautéed, poached, steamed, or grilled instead of fried. If you are unsure how a particular dish is prepared ask your server. Food preparation can greatly influence the calorie and fat content.
- **Meat** – Opt for leaner cuts of meat such a pork loin or beef sirloin. Try eating chicken breasts without the skin.

Believe it or not, eating healthy is possible even when eating out! By making healthy menu selections, you can incorporate the restaurant experience into your healthy lifestyle.