

Super-sizing great for your wallet but not your waist

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From mega mugs of soda that don't even fit into the average car cup holder to jumbo orders of fries that could feed an elephant, many fast-food restaurants are offering super-sized portions that appear to be easy on the pocketbook.

Although super-sizing your fast-food meal may seem like a real bargain, you may pay for the extra calories later, according to a foods expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"A meal that includes a quarter-pound cheeseburger, a large regular soda and large fries gives you almost your entire daily requirement for calories (1,400) and fat (55 grams)," says Mandel Smith, nutrition educator for Penn State Cooperative Extension in Montgomery County.

"If you super-size this meal by increasing the portion size of the fries and soda, the calories can top 1,540," Smith says. "Super-sizing a fast-food meal may cost less than a dollar more, but you may end up super-sizing your waist by eating lots of fat and calories that your body does not need."

Smith points out that portion sizes, in general, are larger today than in the past. "As a result of portions getting bigger, people are getting bigger," she says. "On average, consumption of an additional 100 calories daily beyond your needs can lead to a weight gain of 10 pounds per year."

Smith offers the following suggestions that can help you avoid the super-size trap:

--Review the nutrition facts sheet when you visit a fast-food restaurant.

--Consider how hungry you are before you order. "Pay close attention to your fullness," she advises. "Eat at a slower pace and enjoy each bite. Give your body the chance to feel full. Avoid eating the entire meal just because it is there."

--Share a meal with a family member or friend. "Many times, the portions given are enough for more than one person," Smith notes.

--Avoid fried foods and foods high in fat. "You can order foods that are baked, broiled, grilled or roasted," she says. "If you are not sure how a dish on the menu is prepared, ask the server."

--Instead of fries, consider a side salad with a fat-free or reduced-calorie dressing.

--Order a diet soft drink or plain water.

--Skip the mayonnaise when ordering your favorite fast-food burger.

Smith also advises ordering a small, regular or junior burger. "A small burger may be large enough for you," she says.

Source: Penn State

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