

# Strategies for eating out, managing weight differ by gender

May 5 2010

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(PhysOrg.com) -- When eating out, women more often use weight management strategies -- such as ordering salad dressing on the side and having half of the meal packaged to go -- than men do, according to a University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing researcher.

Women also more frequently share appetizers, substitute an appetizer for a meal, eat a salad for the main course and share a meal with a dining partner, said Dr. Gayle Timmerman.

Results of her study, "Strategies for and Barriers to Managing Weight When Eating in Restaurants," were published this week in the online journal *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice and Policy*.

"Eating in restaurants contributes to excess [caloric intake](#), which leads to [weight gain](#), but little is known about strategies used to manage weight while eating out," said Timmerman, who specializes in binge eating, [emotional eating](#) and weight management. "It becomes especially important to look at weight strategies in restaurants as more Americans become overweight and more people are eating out."

Americans are 40 percent more likely to eat out at least three times a week than they were in the 1980s, often eating large portions of calorie-dense foods, Timmerman said.

Dramatic increases in the prevalence of obesity in the past 25 years are

attributed to an environment that promotes excessive [calorie intake](#), coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, said Timmerman, adding that [obesity](#) increases a person's risk for developing chronic health problems such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

"To address the [obesity epidemic](#), we need a comprehensive understanding of what contributes to excess intake," she said in the journal article. "Knowledge about how restaurant eating contributes to weight gain and how people can combat that weight gain is needed to prevent chronic disease."

Study participants ate out an average of 3.5 times per week, and men and women did not differ in frequency of eating out. Of the 41 percent of participants who reported eating in response to emotions, most (70 percent) were women. More than half (60 percent) of the participants reported they watched what they ate to manage weight at least sometimes.

The most common weight management strategies used by participants in the study were avoiding sugar-filled drinks, choosing steamed vegetables and whole-grain foods, and stopping eating when full.

Strategies that were rarely used for both women and men were removing the bread or chip basket from the table, having a low-calorie snack before going out to eat and asking the chef to prepare a menu item in a low-calorie or low-fat manner.

"We found some differences in the [weight management](#) strategies used by men and women, but I actually thought we would find more," said Timmerman. "The leading barriers for both women and men were that a busy lifestyle results in being overly hungry when eating out, restaurant food tastes good and not wanting to waste food."

If restaurants made nutrition information available on menus, including the portion sizes served, customers could weigh the cost of consumption in terms of calories and fat, Timmerman said. Other approaches would be to provide restaurants with incentives to offer smaller portions or provide take-home containers concurrent with the meal.

"This is something that I do when going out to eat," she said. "I have half the meal boxed up to take home when it is served."

Read the research article online at "[Strategies for and Barriers to Managing Weight When Eating at Restaurants](https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-05-strategies-weight-differ-gender.html)."

Provided by News from The University of Texas at Austin

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