

Frequent dining out might widen your waistline, study finds

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People who ate out a lot also had worse cholesterol levels than those who dined at home.

(HealthDay)—Love to dine out? You could be at higher risk for becoming overweight and having poorer cholesterol levels than people who prefer to eat at home, a new study suggests.

Researchers led by Ashima Kant of Queens College, City University of New York, analyzed data from more than 8,300 American adults between 2005 and 2010.

The researchers found that people who ate six or more meals a week away from home had a higher [body mass index](#) (an estimate of body fat based on height and weight), lower levels of [high-density lipoprotein](#) (HDL) cholesterol—the so-called "good" [cholesterol](#)—and lower blood concentrations of nutrients, including vitamins C and E.

These health effects were more pronounced in women and in people older than 50, according to the study published Oct. 16 in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

Men tended to eat at restaurants more than women, the study found, and those most apt to dine out were in their 20s and 30s with college degrees and higher incomes.

Two nutritionists not connected to the study said they weren't surprised by the results.

"We know that fast food and restaurant meals are higher in fat, salt and calories, and lower in nutritional value because they don't always include fruits, vegetables and whole grains," said Amy Connell, a registered dietitian with dining services at St. John's University in New York City.

"People at both ends of the economic spectrum often eat out and may not realize that poor nutrition not only contributes to [weight gain](#), but also increases the risk of disease," she added.

Christine Santori is a registered dietitian and program manager for weight management at Syosset Hospital in Syosset, N.Y. She pointed out that, "as a country, we eat out more than we did a few decades ago. For many individuals this can be a major obstacle in controlling their weight and health status."

One big reason? Portion size. "Restaurants pull customers in with big plates and other 'values,'" Santori said. "Most often we do not eat based on our internal hunger and satiety cues, we eat the amount that is put in front of us."

On the other hand, "by consuming more meals at home, we control the ingredients, portion size, and have a better chance of eating mindfully,"

she said.

But what if your job or lifestyle has you frequently eating at restaurants? Connell said there are ways to help stay healthy.

"These include choosing grilled, baked or steamed foods; swapping fries for salad or vegetables; and taking home half the meal if the portions are large—some restaurants' dinner entrees actually have three- to four-servings worth of calories," she said.

And, "to reduce the number of times you eat out every week, try using a slow cooker or plan a week's worth of meals."

More information: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers tips for www.eatright.org/Public/content.aspx?id=5671 target="_new">eating out.

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