

Fast food: Tips for choosing healthier options

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Does following a weight-loss or healthy diet mean you must swear off fast food? Not necessarily.

An occasional stop for fast food can fit into a [healthy diet](#)—if you're

careful about what you order. Consider the following tips.

Keep portion sizes small. If the fast-food restaurant offers several sandwich sizes, pick the smallest. Bypass hamburgers with two or three patties, which can be close to 800 calories. Choose instead a regular- or children's-sized hamburger, which has about 250 calories.

Skip the large serving of French fries and ask for a small serving instead. This switch alone can save 200 calories.

Choose healthier side dishes. Take advantage of the healthy side dishes offered at many fast-food restaurants. For example, instead of French fries choose a [side salad](#) with low-fat dressing or a baked potato. Or add a [fruit bowl](#) or a fruit and yogurt option to your meal.

Other healthy choices include apple or orange slices, corn on the cob, steamed rice or baked potato chips.

Go green. Choose an entree salad with grilled chicken, shrimp or vegetables. Choose a dressing you like, but be cautious with the amount. Use half the package or keep the salad dressing on the side to control the number of calories from added fat and other unwanted ingredients, such as added salt and sugar.

Watch out for high-calorie salads, such as those with deep-fried shells or those topped with breaded chicken or other fried toppings. Also skip extras, such as cheese and croutons, which quickly increase your calorie count.

Opt for grilled items. Fried and breaded foods, such as crispy chicken sandwiches and breaded fish fillets, are high in fat and calories. Select grilled or roasted [lean meats](#)—such as turkey or chicken breast, lean ham or lean roast beef.

Watch what you drink. Many beverages are high in calories. For example, a large regular soda (30 ounces, or 887 milliliters) has more than 300 calories. Instead, order diet soda, water, unsweetened iced tea, sparkling water or [mineral water](#).

Also, skip the shakes and other ice cream drinks. Large shakes can contain more than 800 calories.

Have it your way. Remember, you don't have to settle for what comes with your sandwich or meal—not even at [fast-food](#) restaurants. Ask for healthier options and substitutions. And keep your eye on portion size.

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