

# Healthy Choices when Eating Out



Kansas State University  
Agricultural Experiment Station  
and Cooperative Extension Service

Family & Consumer  
SCIENCES

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## Educational goals

*Healthy Choices when Eating Out*, MF-2770, will enable participants to:

- ▶ Better understand marketing techniques that restaurants use to encourage diners to order more food.
- ▶ Locate restaurant menu choices that are lower in fat and calories.
- ▶ Make healthful selections among menu items at specialty restaurants.
- ▶ Feel comfortable asking for special preparation methods.

## Intended audiences

- ▶ FCE groups
- ▶ Consumer or weight-management study groups
- ▶ Individual study

## Suggested introduction ideas

Introduce the session with one or more of the following questions and ideas from the paragraph below:

- ▶ How many of you have eaten away from home this week?
- ▶ Do you choose foods as carefully when you eat away from home as when you eat at home?
- ▶ Do you think that eating away from home can be as healthy as eating at home?

It is often difficult to make healthy choices when eating away from home. Most consumers eat out frequently, and food is available almost anywhere, anytime

today. It is tempting to overeat and to eat less healthful foods. We will discuss some strategies today that you can use to help you enjoy lower fat and lower calorie meals when eating away from home.

## Suggested program preparation

1. Review this leader's guide and the fact sheet *Healthy Choices when Eating Out*, MF-2770.
2. Review some of the Web sites and references of nutrition listings for chain restaurants.
3. Review the food guidance system *MyPyramid* and understand the food groups and suggested serving amounts.

## Suggested teaching activities

- ▶ Collect menus from local restaurants to review and discuss as a group.
- ▶ Make a visual aid to show the amount of sugar in soft drinks. Use a clean, dry plastic soft-drink bottle. Put the amount of sugar in the bottle that would be in the soft drink (4 grams of sugar equal 1 teaspoon). A 20-ounce bottle is usually about 250 calories, with 70 grams of sugar: 17½ teaspoons. Remember to point out that, according to the nutrition label, this bottle is 2.5 servings.
- ▶ Ask each participant to name a favorite restaurant meal. Discuss its healthful components and how it could be prepared with lower fat, fewer calories and/or more fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- ▶ Use the questions at the end of this guide for group discussion. For some, there is

no definite right or wrong answer, but the questions can be used as discussion points.

- ▶ Do the “What is your menu choice?” activity on the last page of the fact sheet.

### Suggested community activities

1. Talk to restaurant managers to encourage them to offer lower-fat menu choices and more fruits and vegetables.
2. When your community service group handles concessions at an event or serves a meal, plan to offer healthful choices.
3. Visit with members of the wellness policy committee in your school district. Is there some way you can help support their efforts?

### Discussion questions

After the lesson, ask participants for responses to the following questions. Ask them if their responses are different than they would have been before the presentation.

1. Restaurants usually serve a standard (according to *MyPyramid*) food portion.
2. It is best to “save up” before going to a restaurant so you can eat all you want.
3. Sharing a meal can be a good idea.
4. Restaurants have a set preparation method for each food and cannot vary from that.
5. Beans and whole-grain breads are good choices to add fiber.

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#### Resources

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service; Tufts University Health and Nutrition Newsletter; Weight Control Information Network, NIDDK, National Institutes of Health; *Timely Topics*, *Dining on a Dime* and *You Asked It*, Department of Human Nutrition, Kansas State University.

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6. Lettuce salad is the best vegetable choice.
7. Low-calorie salad dressings and low-fat milk choices are ways to reduce calories in restaurant meals.
8. A regular baked potato is usually equal to the recommended ½ cup vegetable serving.
9. Research shows that the more a person eats out, the more likely the individual is to have extra weight.
10. Eating away from home can be a healthy and enjoyable experience.

### Helpful Web sites

Most chain restaurants have Web sites, and a few are listed below. Do a search to find restaurants in your area.

[www.mcdonalds.com](http://www.mcdonalds.com)

[www.sonicdrivein.com](http://www.sonicdrivein.com)

[www.applebees.com](http://www.applebees.com)

[www.chilis.com](http://www.chilis.com)

[www.papajohnsonline.com](http://www.papajohnsonline.com)

[www.olivegarden.com](http://www.olivegarden.com)

For more information, try the sites below:

[www.atfood.com](http://www.atfood.com)

[www.cspinet.org/restaurantreport.pdf](http://www.cspinet.org/restaurantreport.pdf) (p.24)

[www.restaurant.org/dineout](http://www.restaurant.org/dineout)

[www.bddiabetes.com](http://www.bddiabetes.com)

(Diabetes site also offers general nutrition information. Go to the *Site Map*, then *Educational Literature* for the *Fast Food Guide* and *Dining Out Guide*.)