



Choose This, Not That: Healthy & Unhealthy Choices at Fast Food Restaurants

It can be challenging to make healthy choices when eating out. Parents can limit trips to fast food restaurants by planning ahead and having healthy choices ([/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/nutrition/Pages/Making-Healthy-Food-Choices.aspx](#)) available at home, or to packing snacks ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Choosing-Healthy-Snacks-for-Children.aspx](#)) or meals for when away from home.



Tips for Eating at a Fast Food Restaurant:

- **Before you go, look at the menu online and plan the meal.** Look for items lower in saturated fat, sodium, added sugars, and calories.
- **Pay attention to portion sizes.** Due to large portions ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Portions-and-Serving-Sizes.aspx](#)), one meal at a fast food restaurant may contain as many calories as a child needs for a whole day. Decrease portion size by sharing your meal, putting half of your meal in a to go container for a later meal, and/or resisting the urge to "clean your plate" ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/The-Clean-Plate-Club.aspx](#))."
- **Avoid sugary drinks.** A large soda may contain 17 teaspoons of sugar and several hundred calories. Consider water or unsweetened tea instead of soda, fruit punch, or a shake.
- **Choose items that are grilled or baked items over fried or breaded.**
- **Go light on sauces** like mayonnaise and ketchup which contain sugar, fat, and salt.
- **Skip the cheese.**
- **Look for fruit, vegetable, and salad** with low calorie dressing options.

Examples of Choosing Healthier Options:

- Chicken fajita instead of a breaded chicken sandwich
- Lean burger instead of an oversized special with lots of fat-laden trimmings
- Baked potato, fruit or salad with low fat dressing or steamed vegetables instead of high-fat French fries
- Main-course salad from the salad bar with low-calorie dressing (skip the bacon bits and croutons)
- Nonfat frozen yogurt with a fresh fruit topping instead of an ice cream sundae or a large slice of pie
- Pizza with whole grain crust topped with vegetables like tomato sauce, mushrooms, eggplant, and peppers instead of high-fat toppings like sausage, pepperoni, and extra cheese
- Low-fat milkshake or water instead of soda or a regular shake

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

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- [Portions and Serving Sizes \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Portions-and-Serving-Sizes.aspx\)](#)
- [Energy In: Recommended Food & Drink Amounts for Children \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Energy-In-Recommended-Food-Drink-Amounts-for-Children.aspx\)](#)
- [Making Healthy Food Choices \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/nutrition/Pages/Making-Healthy-Food-Choices.aspx\)](#)
- [Choosing Healthy Snacks for Kids \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Choosing-Healthy-Snacks-for-Children.aspx\)](#)

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