

Making Healthy Choices from a Restaurant Menu

Tip 1: Be prepared.

Many restaurants now have websites where you can download menus. If possible, do your homework before you go. Look through the menu and decide on your choices beforehand, so you aren't caught off guard.

Tip 2: Look for lean protein and veggies. You can order off menu to combine them.

Examples include a salad topped with a chicken breast or shrimp; or substituting additional veggies instead of starch for an entrée. Look for "side orders" that may include veggies or fruit, or things like scrambled eggs for brunch. Any way you can strategize around excess processed carbs to get lean protein and veggies is good. Don't be shy about asking for substitutions.

Tip 3: Don't believe what menus say.

Don't believe anything a menu says. It's designed to catch your attention and make you want to eat, not give you the facts.

A lot of English grads are employed by restaurant chains. Their job? To make often-prefabricated food sound appealing. Examples include:

Cooking methods	Adjectives	Health claims	Hints of the exotic
grilled	succulent	"healthy option"	"home-baked bread"
baked	tender	"heart-healthy"	"Colonel's secret blend of herbs and spices"
broiled	crispy	"vegetarian choice"	

The example below, for instance, is pure marketing fluff. There is actually a “Culinary Institute of Tuscany” but “inspired by” is not the same as “prepared by a Tuscan chef”. And Garden Fare is a long way from the garden.



Ask your server how the dish is prepared. You might imagine that “grilled” involves an open flame, but very likely the food’s been fried, imprinted with fake grill marks, frozen, shipped, then reheated at the restaurant. “Baked” might be followed by “with cheese”.

Tip 4: Watch your language!

Menus use code words. Watch for them.

Word/phrase	What it usually means
Creamy, rich	High fat – and probably not even real cream, but vegetable oils and emulsifiers
Breaded, lightly coated, crispy, “popcorn”	Battered and deep fried
Cheesy	Smothered in cheese – and again, probably not the real stuff either
Sautéed, grilled, sizzling	Fried (unless it says “flame grilled”, and then that might just be reheated on a grill)
Sweet and savory/sour Honey-garlic, caramelized, glazed	Sugar added – lots of it

Succulent, tender	Processed, lots of fat
“Heart-healthy”; vegetarian	High in grains or low fat but high sugar
“Piled high”	Giant, possibly obscene portion size
Layered, topped with, smothered	Layers of fat added to improve “mouth feel”

Here’s an example. This entire appetizer selection is pretty much a disaster. (There may, indeed, be some spinach in that spinach dip, but it’s about 1% of the dish.)




appetizers

Four Cheese Spinach Dip
A rich, creamy blend of cheese, spinach, red pepper and onion. Served with toasted garlic naan bread. 9.99

Baked Feta Shrimp
Tender shrimp, onions, mushrooms, grape tomatoes, Feta cheese and a splash of Ouzo, all baked to a light golden brown. Served with toasted garlic naan bread. 10.49

Kelsey's Fully Loaded Nachos
Piled high and layered with three types of cheese, ancho-spiced beef, grilled peppers, onions and jalapeños. Served with salsa and sour cream. 12.49 Add guacamole .99

Bruschetta Feta Flatbread
Freshly diced tomatoes marinated in balsamic vinegar, garlic and olive oil. Topped with Feta cheese, lightly baked and served with toasted garlic naan bread. 7.99

Popcorn Shrimp
Crispy shrimp, lightly coated with a special seasoning and mild jalapeños for just a hint of spice. Served with cilantro lime and spicy Thai chili sauce. 9.99

Calamari
Tender calamari, lightly coated and topped with lemon pepper. Served with your choice of tzatziki or spicy Thai chili sauce. 9.49

Blue Cheese Kettle Chips
Thick cut potato chips stacked high and layered with our creamy Blue cheese sauce, double smoked bacon and green onions. 6.99

Ask what’s in the dish. Is there added cheese, oil, butter, sugar, etc.?

Remember your lesson on how to read product labels and apply the same critical eye!

Tip 5: Be careful of health claims.

Restaurants are responding to health-conscious consumers... kind of. But often what they label as “healthy” is anything but.

Let’s look at some examples.

Here’s one from the Olive Garden. Sounds good, right? No sugar chocolate! Wow!

Uhh... wait a sec... 800 calories? That’s nearly half the daily intake for the average woman.

If You're Watching Sugar

We are proud to offer a dessert with no added sugar, sweetened with sugar alcohols.

Torta di Chocolate

A warm double chocolate cake served with vanilla cream sauce and fresh strawberries. No sugar added.

Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Carbohydrates	Sodium	Fiber
800	51	29	75	125	4



Another example is “low-fat”. Many unhealthy things are low-fat: jellybeans, cola, etc. Often, manufacturers put sugar and salt in to foods to compensate for lower fat. Low fat doesn’t mean low calorie, low sugar, or high protein. Here’s an example, again from Olive Garden:

Low Fat

Carbohydrates

Gluten Free

Children's

No Sugar Added

If You're Looking for Low Fat Options

Look for the olive branch on our menus to easily find our low-fat selections. Try one of them, and when you substitute sautéed fresh vegetables for potatoes as your side, you have a delicious low-fat meal.

Capellini Pomodoro

Roma tomatoes, garlic, fresh basil and extra-virgin olive oil tossed with capellini.

	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Carbohydrates	Sodium	Fiber
Lunch	480	11	2	78	970	11
Dinner	840	17	3	141	1250	19

Venetian Apricot Chicken

Grilled chicken breasts in an apricot citrus sauce. Served with broccoli, asparagus and diced tomatoes.

	Calories	Total Fat	Sat. Fat	Carbohydrates	Sodium	Fiber
Lunch	280	3	1	32	1180	8
Dinner	380	4	1.5	32	1420	8

Option 2 – Venetian apricot chicken – is definitely a good choice, although there's a good chance that the “apricot citrus sauce” has sugar.

Option 1 – capellini pomodoro – is not. There's no protein, and the dinner-sized entrée is 840 calories.

Tip 6: Portion sizing – try appetizers

If you're in an American restaurant, there's an excellent chance that your portion will be much too big.

Americans like to feel they're getting value for their money, and in the last two decades, restaurants have increasingly catered to this perception with bigger and bigger servings. Don't rely on them to tell you how much you need.

Often, even the appetizers are enormous.

Take a look at these “appetizers” from Olive Garden.

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Antipasti (Appetizers)



Create a Sampler Italiano

Choose from: calamari, stuffed mushrooms, fried zucchini, chicken fingers, fried mozzarella or toasted beef and pork ravioli.

Stuffed mushrooms prepared with clams.

Three Choices 13.50

Two Choices 12.25



Bruschetta

A traditional topping of roma tomatoes, fresh basil and extra-virgin olive oil. Served with toasted ciabatta bread.

8.95



Caprese Flatbread

Mozzarella cheese, tomatoes and basil on flatbread crust with garlic spread.

8.95

The bread and dip has pretty much an entire loaf there. And the flatbread is more or less a full medium pizza.

That being said, ordering from the appetizer menu is often a good option. This is where you'll usually find soups and small portions of protein, which you can then pair with veggies.

Here's an example from a Thai restaurant.

In this case, satay is part of the appetizer offering. Pair a skewer of shrimp or chicken with a salad, or even the eggplant satay, and you're all set.

SATAY

Four Skewers of Tasty Meat or Seafood Marinated with Unique Fragrant Spices. Prepared in the Malaysian Tradition. Served with Stir-Fried Fresh Mixed Vegetables and delicious peanut sauce. Your choice of Steamed Rice or Roti.

01. Bean Curd.....	\$9.99	05 Lamb.....	\$13.99
02. Eggplant.....	\$9.99	06. Squid.....	\$11.99
03. Crab Meat.....	\$10.99	07 Beef.....	\$12.99
04. Chicken.....	\$11.99	08. Shrimp.....	\$12.99
09. COMBINATION SATAY	\$16.99		

Eight Skewers of Satay. One of each as Above served with Stir-Fried Fresh Mixed Vegetables, Steamed Rice and Delicious Peanut Sauce.


Tip 7: Soup

Soup is often another good choice. It often has veggies, and it's often lower in overall calories.


But choose your soups wisely.

These below, for example, are all pretty much no-gos. Notice our “danger words”: “smothered”, “creamy”, “topped”, “rich”, etc. Sure, the broccoli cheddar might seem like it has healthy veggies, but everything else in the dish pretty much cancels out whatever small amount of greenery is in there. It's also served with pesto bread, which is probably oiled white bread.

And check out the photo. There's probably 6 oz of cheese there.



French Onion Soup
Onions slow roasted in white wine and smothered in a rich beef broth. Topped with Gruyere cheese and baked to a golden brown. 6.99

 **Broccoli Cheddar Soup**
A creamy blend of broccoli florets and special seasonings, topped with Canadian Cheddar cheese and served with our pesto filoni bread. 4.99

Soup of the Day
Served with our pesto filoni bread. Ask your server for today's soup selection. 4.99

 Kelsey's Classic
 Vegetarian

Some items may contain nuts.
Prices do not include tax.

This menu below has a couple of better options.

Chicken and gnocchi? Nope. You might see “spinach” and think “veggies”, but look at the picture: the proportion of veg is small. Note “creamy”, plus it has “dumplings”, which are basically white flour and butter.

Pasta e fagioli or Minestrone are better options with the beans, veggies and protein.

Zuppe e insalate (soups & salads)



Chicken & Gnocchi

A creamy soup made with roasted chicken, traditional Italian dumplings and spinach.

6.50



Pasta e Fagioli

White and red beans, ground beef, tomatoes and pasta in a savory broth.

6.50



Minestrone

Fresh vegetables, beans and pasta in a light tomato broth a vegetarian classic.

6.50

Tip 8: Salad

Salad is often a good bet. By definition, it has veggies, plus you can usually get some protein on top or on the side.

But be conscious of the fact that restaurants often drown their salads in high-calorie dressings (both high-fat and high-sugar) and other things like creamy cheeses, croutons, bacon, tortilla chips, or sugared nuts. “Greens” may be no-vitamin “whites” like iceberg lettuce. Below are four examples of salads that sound healthy, but aren’t necessarily.

In this case, you can try ordering a salad without many of the offending toppings, or simply pick the toppings off.

The strawberry, spinach and arugula salad would be a good bet here, if you get chicken on top and cut down the cheese and nuts.

Get the dressing on the side so you can control the amount.



dinner salads

Chicken Sonoma Valley Salad

Mixed greens topped with seasoned grilled chicken, red peppers, grape tomatoes, crumbled Feta cheese, croutons, raisins, mixed seeds and nuts. Served with our spicy honey citrus dressing. 11.99

Clubhouse Salad

Mixed greens tossed in ranch dressing and topped with seasoned grilled chicken, double smoked bacon, guacamole, bruschetta tomatoes, Feta cheese and croutons. 12.49

Cajun Chicken Caesar Salad

Crisp romaine lettuce tossed in our Caesar dressing and topped with a seasoned grilled chicken breast, croutons and Parmesan cheese. 11.99

Strawberry, Spinach and Arugula Salad

Spinach and arugula tossed in a Honey Dijon dressing and topped with red onions, sweet and spicy glazed walnuts, crumbled Blue cheese and strawberries. 11.49

Below, a comparison of two salads from the same restaurant. Which is better?

If you guessed the garden-fresh one, you're right. The Caesar involves "creamy" dressing, "topped" with cheese and croutons.

Get the garden-fresh salad, get the dressing on the side, and add a chicken breast.



Garden-Fresh Salad

Our famous house salad, tossed with our signature Italian dressing.

(Unlimited refills!)

7.50



Grilled Chicken Caesar

Grilled chicken over romaine in a creamy Caesar dressing topped with imported parmesan cheese and croutons.

12.95


Tip 9: Portion sizing 2 – eat half now.

Sometimes, entrées are actually good options if the salads, soups, and appetizers are too full of junk. Many entrées are some combination of protein + veggies.


Here's an option (below) that would be a good choice. It's got protein and veggies.

The only problem is that if you're watching your overall food intake, the portion is more than you need. Plus it has 1895 grams of sodium. (The average daily recommendation is no more than 1500 mg daily.)

What to do? Order it, eat half of it, and ask the server to wrap up the remainder. (Better yet, ask the server to wrap it up immediately, before you eat, so it's not sitting there in front of you whispering "*Eaaat meee*".)

**Mixed Grill**
Skewers of grilled steak and chicken marinated in Italian herbs and extra-virgin olive oil. Served with broccoli and grilled vegetables.

	Calories	TotalFat	Sat.Fat	Carbohydrates	Sodium	Fiber
Dinner	760	24	6	26	1895	11



Tip 10: Go fish.

Fish and seafood are often good options. (Fish and chips don't count. Sorry.)

Shellfish are typically lower in calories – if they're baked or steamed in a non-creamy sauce. Look for things like shrimp cocktails or satay, for example.

Fish or crab cakes from the appetizer menu may be a good option if they're baked, not deep fried.

Many Asian restaurants (e.g. Korean, Japanese, Thai) offer excellent fish/seafood soups that are not made with a cream-based broth. When going out for sushi, opt for sashimi and other styles of serving the fish alone, such as seafood salads. (Try a seaweed salad – loaded with vitamins and minerals!)

Many American-style and European-style restaurants offer a fish entrée that is some combination of a fish filet and veggies. Here's one good option (right), although again the portion size is probably too large, so use Tip 9.

**Herb-Grilled Salmon**
Salmon filet brushed with Italian herbs and extra-virgin olive oil. Served with seasoned broccoli.
22.75

Tip 11: Look for the *best possible* option.

Let's say you have no other option but burgers. (Hard to imagine, but maybe you're like Homer Simpson – marooned on an unstaffed oil rig in the middle of the ocean with only a Krusty Burger.)

But not to despair. It's all about choosing what's "better" in a relative sense, even if it can't be "ideal". Look at the options below and decide which of them is the better option.

burgers

K Cracked Peppercorn Sirloin Burger
Lightly coated with cracked black peppercorns and topped with two crispy onion rings, peppercorn ranch sauce and melted Gruyere cheese. 11.49

Cheddar Bacon Sirloin Burger
Topped with double smoked bacon, Canadian Cheddar cheese, tomatoes, shredded lettuce, red onions and mayonnaise. 11.49

The Ultimate Blue Cheese Sirloin Burger
Loaded with crumbled Blue cheese, double smoked bacon, tomatoes, shredded lettuce, red onions and Blue cheese dressing. 12.49

Classic Sirloin Burger
Topped with tomatoes, shredded lettuce, red onions and mayonnaise. 9.99

Veggie Burger
Topped with bruschetta tomatoes, shredded lettuce, grilled red onions and our authentic tzatziki. 9.99

All Burgers & Sandwiches are served with your choice of side:

- Fries
- Coleslaw
- Caesar or House Salad
- Kettle Chips
- Broccoli Cheddar Soup
- Soup of the Day

UPGRADE TO A SIDE SONOMA VALLEY SALAD ONLY 99¢



If you picked either the veggie burger or the classic sirloin, you're right.

For the most part these are free of cheese, bacon, "crispy onion rings", ranch dressing, or any other fatty, sugary crud.

However, we'd understand if you were a little suspicious of the tzatziki, and we suggest you hold the mayo on that sirloin burger. Get both on the side so YOU can control the portions.

If you like, try an open-face burger by removing one of the buns.

Also, notice the sides. Opt for a house salad to round out your veggie portion and don't be tempted by the upgrade.