

**From the book: “Eat This, Not That!” by David Zinczenko with Matt Goulding**

## **14 Restaurant SURVIVAL STRATEGIES**

**Whether you find yourself in the drive-thru or the local sushi den, use these immutable rules to navigate the many nutritional land mines waiting for you in the restaurant world.**

### **1) Front-load with protein**

So what’s the best way to start the meal? Easy – you want something with lean protein. A study published in *Physiology & Behavior* showed that people who ate a protein-heavy appetizer consumed an average of 16 percent fewer calories in their entrée than those who loaded up with carbohydrates. The effect is spoiled, though, if you wolf down a bunch of greasy chicken strips. Look for something like shrimp cocktail, which hasn’t been deep-fried or slathered with cheese.

### **2) Beware of the booze**

We know life’s rough, but here’s the deal: The standard cocktail has anywhere from 200 to 500 calories, yet those who drink before a meal actually wind up eating more come chow time. Researchers in the Netherlands gave people a premeal treatment of booze, food, water, or nothing. Those who had the booze spent more time eating, began feeling full later in the meal, and consumed an average of 192 extra calories.

### **3) Beware of portion distortion**

According to data collected by the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey, food portions are growing. Hamburgers, for instance, have grown by 97 calories since 1977. French fries have grown by 68 calories. The problem with this is, as the research points out, that people don’t necessarily stop eating when they’re full. Students at Cornell were given access to an all-you-can-eat buffet and told to go to town. Researchers took note of how much they ate; the following week, they served the same students portions of either equal size, 25 percent bigger, or 50 percent bigger. Those with 25 percent more food ate 164 more calories, and those with 50 percent more food ate 221 extra calories.

### **4) Enjoy the conversation**

It takes your stomach about 20 minutes to tell you that you’re full. That means you need to eat slowly so you get the message before you’ve overeaten. That shouldn’t be hard – just set your fork down every now and again and tell one of the many adventurous stories from your childhood. Told them already? Make up some new ones.

### **5) Avoid Handouts**

Just because it doesn’t cost money doesn’t mean it doesn’t have a price. Munch on a couple of Olive Garden’s bread sticks or Red Lobster’s Cheddar Bay Biscuits and you’ve just put down 300 calories before your meal arrives. A basket of chips at the Mexican joint? Expect a price tag around 500 calories, which can easily double the impact of an entrée. Not so free now, is it?



**6) Don't fall for combos**

At every fast-food restaurant, as soon as you decide on an entrée, expect to face some variation of this question: "Would you like to make it a combo meal?" Of course, you're tempted. This is the modern-day equivalent of supersizing, wherein you get an average of 55 percent more calories for 17 percent more money. It's also the cheapest way to get fat in a hurry. Just say no.

**7) Drink responsibly**

Sure, sure, you know all about the dangers of soda, but here's what you might not realize: A cup of sweet tea is only marginally better than Pepsi. Each glass you drink with dinner adds about 120 calories to your meal, and the same goes with juice. In fact, America's love affair with flavored drinks adds 450 calories to our daily diet, according to a study from the University of North Carolina. That's an extra 47 pounds of body mass to burn off (or not) each year. Switch to water, though, and it has the opposite effect: The more you drink, the more you shrink. Choose accordingly.

**8) Think big**

Restaurants are not required to emblazon nutritional information on the side of their plates, which makes it nearly impossible to guess how many calories are in each meal. Care to venture a guess? Well, if you're like most people, you're not even in the ballpark. A 2006 study published in the American Journal of Public Health found that consumers given an obviously high-calorie meal still underestimate the caloric load by an average of 600 calories. Use that as the new barometer to gauge the heft of your dinner.

**9) Think thin**

Want to know the easiest way to make a portly pizza? Here's a hint: It has nothing to do with toppings. Nope, the biggest problem facing your pie is the massive boat of oily crust hunkering along the bottom. Your best defense is to order it as thin as you can. Three deep dish slices from a large Domino's pie, before toppings, will cost you 1,002 calories. Downsize that to a thin crust and you just burned off 420 calories without lifting a finger. Who knew losing weight could be so easy.

**10) Invite the kids to the grown-up table**

Speaking of pizza, how do you rein in the kid's growing affection for cheese or pepperoni? Not by ordering them a personal pan found on so many kid's menus across America. The mini pepperoni at Pizza Hut runs 660 calories, and even the kid's regular crust pizza at Uno's Chicago Grill has 780 calories. And it's not just pizza: from 873-calorie nachos at On the Border, kids' menus are often cluttered with problematic foods. Massive portions like this help explain how today's little ones consume 180 more calories per day than their peers of 1989. That's a lot of girth over the course of childhood. Instead of ordering whole meals, combat the trend by feeding the small appetites with a little off your plate. A couple of slices of your thin pepperoni pizza, for instance, will cost only 400 calories. Half a cheeseburger? About 350 calories. Make this the norm and you'll save calories for them and yourself.



### **11) Side with sides**

Some of the best of restaurant fare can be found in the side items section of the menu. Plates of black beans, roasted seasonal vegetables, and even skewers of “add-on” shrimp are prime fodder for a healthy meal. Stick to two and you can walk out feeling better for not having busted your calorie bank. (Oh, and you’ll save cash, too – if you’re into that kinda thing.)

### **12) Personalize your order**

Think of the menu as a list of starting points. Any respectable joint in the country—even fast food purveyors—will tailor to your wants. The caloric savings are as big as our imagination. Take a BLT – ask for mustard instead of mayo, then pick off a slice or two of bacon and you’ve just cut 250 to 400 calories from your sandwich. Use these to help you get the hang of it: Ask them to sub in whole-grain bread on your sandwich at Panera, to make your pasta with whole wheat noodles at Macaroni Grill, and to go light on the oil with your omelet at Denny’s. There, wasn’t that easy?

### **13) Order it to go**

How many times have you finished your plate just because there wasn’t enough to take home? Well, next time, make sure there’s enough. Every time you order a full-size dinner entrée, ask the server to deliver a to-go box with your food. The food is easier to divide before you start eating, and you won’t have to fight the temptation of a half-eaten manicotti sticking in your face.

### **14) Be a dessert dodger**

When the food industry research company, Technomic surveyed 1,500 people on their dessert habits, not a single person reported that they never ate dessert. To contrast, 57 percent said they ate dessert frequently. Of course, there’s no problem with an occasional treat, but there is a problem when it takes on half a day’s calories to the end of your meal. The average dessert at T.G.I. Friday’s, for instance, packs 819 calories. So rather than order your own massive dessert, ask for an extra spoon and take a few bites from your tablemates’ orders. You’ll be doing everyone a favor.

