

Eating Out When You Have Diabetes

With planning and thoughtful choices, you can follow your meal plan for diabetes when you eat at restaurants. Here are some tips:

Plan ahead

- Look for restaurants that have heart-healthy items marked on their menus, and choose these items whenever possible.
- Request pamphlets from your favorite fast-food restaurants—most fast-food restaurants have printed material that provides the carbohydrate, calorie, and fat information for many of their menu items. If this information is not available, go to your local bookstore and buy a pocket guide that includes it.
- Review the diabetes food guide pyramid so that you will know where the various foods fit in and, most importantly, which foods contain carbohydrate.
- Review your meal plan, if necessary, so you will know how many carbohydrate choices you should have at that meal.

Think about your portions

- Ask for a half-size portion of the meal. Or ask if the restaurant offers lunch-sized portions, which tend to be smaller.
- At fast-food restaurants, choose the smallest-size meal option instead of “super-sizing.”
- If you enjoy leftovers, try putting half of your meal in a to-go box. Ask your server to bring the box with your meal, so that you can split the meal before you even take the first bite.
- Try splitting a meal with someone else at your table.
- Avoid all-you-can-eat menu options and buffet-style restaurants. Unlimited refills of soup or pasta may sound like a good deal, but they can make it easier to overeat.
- Appetizers can add a lot of fat and calories (and carbohydrate, depending on the item). Unless healthy choices are available, you may want to skip appetizers, especially if weight loss is a goal for you.

Make your meals lower in fat

- Before you order, find out how the food is prepared. Foods that are grilled, baked, or steamed tend to be lower in fat than foods that are fried. Limit foods that are breaded or that come with cream sauce or gravy.
- Ask to have butter, sour cream, gravy, and sauces served on the side. This will allow you to control how much you use.
- Choose reduced-fat salad dressings. Or choose oil-and-vinegar salad dressings instead of creamy dressings.
- Order hamburgers and sandwiches without the high-fat extras, such as cheese and bacon.
- Rarely choose cream sauces, such as Alfredo, and gravies.

Add fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

- Order extra vegetables on pizzas and sandwiches.
- Substitute vegetables or a baked potato for french fries. At fast-food restaurants, ask if you can have a salad or fruit instead of french fries.
- Try vegetarian menu options. Ethnic restaurants, such as Indian, Thai, or Japanese restaurants, often have a wide variety of vegetarian choices.

- Ask for brown rice and whole-grain pasta instead of white rice and pasta. Pick whole-grain bread and tortillas.

Choose your beverages carefully

- Opt for water instead of sugar-sweetened soft drinks. If you don't like plain water, try other sugar-free or low-calorie beverages, such as fruit-flavored sparkling water or unsweetened iced tea.
- Remember that the calories in alcoholic drinks can add up. A large cocktail, such as a margarita, can have as many calories as your main course.