



# MIDDLESEX COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## TIP SHEET

### Your Guide to Eating Out Healthy

Ronald G. Rios  
Chairman

David A. Papi  
Director

(732) 745-3100  
Fax (732) 745-2568



Eating out is part of our daily lives for business meetings, dinner out with friends, a quick snack at a fast-food place or a special event meal. We eat out because it is easy, quick and fun. But is it healthy?

It can be, but you have to plan ahead and choose wisely.

Some restaurants offer foods low in cholesterol, fat, or sodium or may have some items that are reduced fat or higher in fiber. All restaurants offer low-calorie sweeteners. Many establishments offer reduced-calorie salad dressings, low-fat or fat-free milk, and salt substitutes. You can usually find fresh fish, low-fat meats, salad dishes, baked or broiled foods and whole-grain foods.

Some restaurants have menu items that are labeled as “heart healthy”. You can ask the food establishment for nutrition information on fats, sodium, sugars and calories of their menu items. In all types of establishments you can ask for menu items to be made without mayonnaise or other added fats, substitute egg whites for whole eggs, request lean cuts of meat, ask for the items to be made without salts.

Not everyone has the same nutritional goals. For some, cutting calories is most important. Others may need to limit fat and salt, and eat more foods high in fiber. So, each person may make different modifications to the offerings at a particular establishment.

#### **Here are some tips to help you order more effectively:**

- If you do not know what is in a menu item or the serving size, ask the server.
- Try to eat the same portion size that you would at home. If the serving size is larger, share some with a friend or take the extra home in a container for a second meal.
- Ask for fish or meat broiled with no extra butter or oils.
- Order your baked potato plain and then top it with a teaspoon of margarine or low-calorie sour cream or even lemon and pepper to cut down on calories, cholesterol and sodium.
- Ask for sauces, gravies, and salad dressing on the side. Use a teaspoon or two instead of the whole portion that they give or alternatively dip the tines of your fork in the sauce and then into the food. You will use a lot less this way.

# TIP SHEET

## Here are some tips to help you order more effectively:

- Order foods that are not breaded or fried because they add fat. If the food comes breaded, peel off the outside coating.
- Be creative when reading the menu. You can choose the fruit cup in the dessert column as your appetizer or combine salad and a low fat appetizer instead of a large meal.
- Ask the server for substitutions. Can you have that with whole grain bread, without mayonnaise, a vegetable instead of a potato or steamed vegetables instead of with butter.
- Ask for the low-calorie items, even if they are not on the menu. For example the server may list three or four dressings but you could ask for vinegar and add a dash of oil or a squeeze of lemon.
- Limit alcohol which adds calories but no nutrition to the meal.

## A few provisions for Fast Food

Yes! You can eat healthy at a fast food establishment. Just be aware that the average fast food meal can easily run over 1,000 calories and contain a full day's worth of sodium. So check out the nutritional value of foods by asking the restaurant or checking online at their website before you go. Choose the salads, water or diet sodas or the children's portion if you are craving that food. Also, if you eat fast food for one meal, plan around it to cut the rest of the day's calories, sodium, and sugars and increase fruits and vegetables.

- Watch out for word like **jumbo, giant, deluxe, biggie-sized or super-sized**. Larger portions mean extra calories and more fat, cholesterol, sodium and sugar.
- Skip croissants and biscuits as they have lots of extra fat and very little fiber.
- Pizza can be a good choice but go for the thin crust with vegetables and limit it to 1 - 2 slices.
- End you meal with the sugar-free, fat-free yogurt or a small cone of fat-free yogurt. Ices, sorbets and sherbets have less fat, but still have lots of sugar. Maybe bring a piece of fruit from home for your dessert after eating lunch out.
- Be alert for tricky information. For example a fat-free muffin is fat free but much higher in sugar than another muffin. Chinese food may seem okay if you order steamed vegetables but if you use lots of soy sauce you get too much sodium.

**Eating out can be a true pleasure and often a time saver. But do it wisely!**

