



ASK A NUTRITIONIST

by Tara Postnikoff

Q. WHEN EATING AT A RESTAURANT HOW CAN I SELECT A HEALTHY MEAL TO FUEL MY RUNNING?

A. Eating out can put a real snag in our health and performance goals, but here are some tips to assist with the decision making process and help you select the best options.

1. Eat with purpose

Remember, food contains the building blocks needed for survival, such as vitamins, minerals and enzymes. It also has the carbohydrates, proteins and fats we need to be healthy, to perform and to recover after workouts. Look for the most nutrient-dense options, such as vegetables (although even these choices will likely be prepared with more butter and salt than you would use at home). Adding fresh vegetables to your meal will help with the digestibility, increase the nutritional value and will help fill you up.

2. Plan ahead

If you know you will be eating out, do some research to identify restaurants with healthier options so that you are not selecting a place when you are famished. Most of us make poor decisions when we are hungry and rushed.

3. Read the menu and the ingredients

Don't be fooled by marketing-inspired statements that say "low-fat option". Low-fat often means high-carbohydrate and high-sodium to provide flavour. Look for options that contain mostly vegetables and protein, and bypass entrees that are described as being "smothered" or "covered" with sauce.

4. Pick your protein wisely

Different protein options have different amounts of saturated fats. For example, ground meats tend to have more fat than fish, chicken breast or lean cuts of beef.

Avoid menu items that are fried or deep-fried, and don't eat the skin. Look for grilled, baked or steamed as the method of cooking.

5. Beware of salads

Don't get me wrong: greens are great. But, when you drown them in creamy dressing and top them with croutons, bacon bits, dried fruit and other toppings, your salad can have as much sugar and sodium as an ice-cream sundae. Look for olive oil and vinegar options and ask to have the dressing on the side so you can control how much is added.

6. Evaluate portion size

Aside from the most expensive restaurants, most places serve portions that are larger than needed. Before you dig in, assess the plate. Ideal portioning will have half the plate with veggies and a palm-sized serving of protein. If the portion exceeds this, separate it to an appropriate size and take the rest to go. Alternatively, order an appetizer-sized version, which can often be large enough for a full meal.

7. Drink water

To save on calories that don't offer you any nutritional benefit, choose water over alcohol, pop, juice, milk and coffee-style beverages. Water has no calories and is responsible for transporting nutrients and eliminating wastes in the body. If plain water is unappealing to you with a meal, try some sparkling mineral water instead.

8. Skip the appetizer if you are eating a main course

Before ordering an appetizer, pick your main course to see if it will offer you sufficient calories and nutrients. Sometimes

an appetizer of additional vegetables such as a salad or soup can be warranted, although avoid the creamy versions and ask the server about the ingredients if needed.

9. Avoid dessert

If you were eating at home, would you be having dessert with this meal? Typically no, so avoid ordering it if you are eating out on a regular basis. If it's a special occasion and you are looking for a treat, try sharing with a friend.

While indulgent menu items are undoubtedly tempting, we should always consider the purpose of the meal and how our choices will impact our training, recovery and run performance, especially if eating out is a regular occurrence. **RR**

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