

Class 10: Eating Out at Lunch



America has been called a "fast food nation" and for good reason. One out of four Americans eats fast food every day. If you are eating out, fast food restaurants are often the cheapest option, but unfortunately, not usually the healthiest one. Eating just one fast food meal can pack enough calories, sodium and fat for an entire day, but the quick-and-cheap temptation can be hard to resist.

As an informed customer, you can make healthier choices and still enjoy the convenience of fast food restaurants.

A. Learning to make healthier choices at fast food restaurants

Making healthier choices at fast food restaurants is easier if you prepare ahead by checking guides that show you the nutritional content of meal choices at your favorite restaurants.

- Free downloadable guides help you evaluate your options.
- If you have a special dietary concern, such as diabetes, heart health or weight loss, the websites of national non-profits provide useful advice.
- You can also choose to patronize restaurants that focus on natural, high quality food.

If you don't prepare ahead of time, common sense guidelines help to make your meal healthier.

- A seemingly healthy salad can be a diet minefield when smothered in high-fat dressing and fried toppings, so choose a salad with fresh veggies, grilled toppings and a lighter dressing.
- Portion control is also important, as many fast food restaurants serve enough food for several meals in the guise of a single serving.

B. Top tips for healthy eating at fast food restaurants

1. Make careful menu selections – pay attention to the descriptions on the menu.

- Dishes labeled deep-fried, pan-fried, baked, batter-dipped,

breaded, creamy, crispy, scalloped, Alfredo, au gratin or in cream sauce are usually high in calories, unhealthy fats or sodium.

- Order items with more vegetables and choose leaner meats.

2. Drink water with your meal.

- Soda is a huge source of hidden calories. One 32-oz Big Gulp with regular cola packs about 425 calories, so one Big Gulp can quickly gulp up a big portion of your daily calorie intake.
- Try adding a little lemon to your water or ordering unsweetened iced tea.

3. “Undress” your food.

- When choosing items, be aware of calorie- and fat-packed salad dressings, spreads, cheese, sour cream, etc. For example, ask for a grilled chicken sandwich without the mayonnaise.
- You can ask for a packet of ketchup or mustard and add it yourself, controlling how much you put on your sandwich.

4. Don't be afraid to special order.

- Many menu items would be healthy if it weren't for the way they were prepared.
- Ask for your vegetables and main dishes to be served without the sauces.
- Ask for olive oil and vinegar for your salads or order the dressing "on the side" and spoon only a small amount on at a time.
- If your food is fried or cooked in oil or butter, ask to have it broiled or steamed.

5. Watch portion size –

- An average fast food meal can run as high as 1000 calories or more, so choose a smaller portion size, order a side salad instead of fries, and don't supersize anything.
- At a typical restaurant, a single serving provides enough for two meals. Take half home or divide the portion with a dining partner.
- Sharing might make dessert (or something else indulgent)

more of an option.

6. Watch your salt.

- Fast food restaurant food tends to be very high in sodium, a major contributor to high blood pressure.
- Don't add insult to injury by adding more salt.

7. Avoid buffets – even seemingly healthy ones like salad bars.

- You'll likely overeat to get your money's worth. Decide before you start how many “normal” serving of foods you will choose and stick with it.
- If you do choose buffet dining, opt for fresh fruits, salads with olive oil & vinegar or low-fat dressings, broiled entrees and steamed vegetables.
- Resist the temptation to go for seconds, or wait at least 20 minutes after eating to make sure you're really still hungry before going back for more.

8. Eat mindfully.

- Pay attention to what you eat and savor each bite.
- Chew your food more thoroughly and avoid eating on the run.
- Being mindful also means stopping before you are full. It takes time for our bodies to register that we have eaten. Mindful eating relaxes you, so you digest better, and makes you feel more satisfied.

9. Remember the big picture

- Think of eating out in the context of your whole diet. If it is a special occasion, or you know you want to order your favorite meal at a nice restaurant, make sure your earlier meals that day are extra healthy.
- Moderation is always key, but planning ahead can help you relax and enjoy your dining out experience while maintaining good nutrition and diet control.

C. Healthy Fast Food and Takeout Makeovers: Use this as a group activity. Read the restaurant or takeout source and the usual order. Ask group to discuss what they think would be the healthiest option. Then read the suggestions. The last section provides more generic suggestions to reinforce this activity.



Fast-Food Chain: **Burger King**

If You Usually Order: A Whopper with cheese and a side salad.

Make It Healthier: Satisfy your burger craving (and cut out almost 500 calories) **by replacing the Whopper with a hamburger from the kids' menu.** (Kids' menus offer smaller portions.)

Better Yet: **Order the Tender Grilled Chicken Sandwich** —there's no crispy fried stuff and no creamy sauce, and you can ask them to double up on the lettuce and tomato for an extra helping of vegetables.



Fast-Food Chain: **McDonald's**

If You Usually Order: Six-piece Chicken McNuggets (with a side of ranch sauce) and large French fries.

Make It Healthier: **Ask for medium fries and replace the ranch sauce with barbecue** and you've knocked 345 calories off your meal.

Better Yet: **Get the California Cobb Salad with grilled chicken.** Just beware of what you put on the salad: The Cobb dressing adds 120 calories and 9 grams of fat. Opt for the low-fat balsamic vinaigrette.



Fast-Food Chain: **Wendy's**

If You Usually Order: A loaded baked potato (stuffed with bacon, cheese, low-fat sour cream, and Buttery Best spread) and a small Original Chocolate Frosty.

Make It Healthier: Save 130 calories and 16 grams of fat **by loading your potato with chili, low-fat sour cream, and broccoli.**

Better Yet: Try a baked potato topped with chili, broccoli, and chives. It is filling, has loads of fiber, and has a mere 370 calories and 3 grams of fat. Add a glass of 1 percent reduced-fat chocolate milk to satisfy a sweet tooth.



Fast-Food Chain: KFC

If You Usually Order: An Extra Crispy chicken breast and a side of mashed potatoes and gravy.

Make It Healthier: Order an Original Recipe wing and leg (290 calories and 17 grams of fat total). Though white meat seems a wise choice, the breast is one of the worst items on the menu, with 460 calories and 28 grams of fat.

Better Yet: Get the Honey BBQ Chicken Sandwich. It only has 300 calories and 6 grams of fat. Among sides, best bets include mashed potatoes (without gravy), green beans, and a small corn on the cob.



Fast-Food Chain: Taco Bell

If You Usually Order: Chalupas (fried taco shells filled with cheese and ground beef).

Make It Healthier: “Avoid the crispy things in favor of soft tortillas,” says Leslie Bonci, director of sports medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. (Indeed, the word crispy is often a euphemism for “fried.”)

Better Yet: Order food “Fresco-Style,” which replaces a dish’s normal sauce and cheese with fresh salsa. Loading up on salsa instead of cheese and other sauces can save you hundreds of calories and 10 or more grams of fat.



Fast-Food Chain: Subway

If You Usually Order: A classic tuna sandwich with Cheddar cheese and potato chips.

Make It Healthier: Get a wheat roll, and add extra vegetables. If you can’t omit the cheese, know that American cheese is the lowest-fat option, followed by provolone, with Swiss and Cheddar tied for last. Choose baked chips.

Better Yet: Subway’s tuna salad contains lots of mayonnaise, so a **less cholesterol-raising option would be the Veggie Delite or Turkey-Breast Sandwich** from the “6 Grams of Fat or Less” side of the menu.



Takeout Restaurant: Chinese

If You Usually Order: Vegetable dumplings and shrimp lo mein.

Make It Healthier: Specify steamed dumplings, and ask that your shrimp be served with brown rice (a high-fiber whole grain) rather than noodles (made from refined white flour).

Better Yet: Pile on the vegetables (opt for vitamin- and fiber-rich bok choy and broccoli; go light on less-nutritious baby corn and water chestnuts), and be judicious with sauces (try low-sodium soy).

Takeout Restaurant: Pizza

If You Usually Order: Deep-dish pizza topped with cheese, sausage, and green peppers.



Make It Healthier: Opt for a thin crust, and supplement your meal with a filling, fiber-packed cup of minestrone, found at many sit-down pizza places, says Lisa Dorfman, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

Better Yet: Order a thin crust, light on cheese, with grilled chicken. “You get protein, but save fat and calories,” says David Goldbeck, coauthor of *Healthy Highways: The Traveler’s Guide to Healthy Eating* (www.barnesandnoble.com, Ceres Press, \$19).



Takeout Restaurant: Italian

If You Usually Order: Chicken Parmesan with a side of spaghetti.

Make It Healthier: Try **grilled chicken on top of pasta**. And go local when you can. A mom-and-pop restaurant is more likely than a chain to prepare food the healthful and traditional Mediterranean way (read: less processed).

Better Yet: If you crave pasta, avoid cheese-stuffed varieties (better yet, ask for spaghetti squash), and top it with marinara sauce (as

opposed to anything cream-based). As for meat, choose a chicken or fish dish that isn't fried.

Takeout Restaurant: Japanese



If You Usually Order: Tempura vegetables with California and spicy-tuna rolls.

Make It Healthier: Substitute one item with a side of soy — either a serving of miso soup or a bowl of steamed edamame. And limit your starch serving to an amount the size of a tennis ball, says Dorfman.

Better Yet: Avoid anything “tempura,” which indicates “fried,” and any rolls that contain mayonnaise. Better choices include omega-3-rich fish, like salmon, vegetable rolls, and sushi with avocado, which contains heart-healthy fats.



Takeout Restaurant: Mexican

If You Usually Order: Tacos, with a side of refried beans and rice.

Make It Healthier: Get vegetarian refried beans (which don't contain artery-clogging lard or pork) or plain black beans. Ask for extra guacamole (a source of healthy monounsaturated fat) instead of sour cream.

Choose an item that's wrapped in a soft—not fried—tortilla, such as a burrito. Cram it full of vegetables, go light on the cheese, and add guacamole, which enhances the antioxidant benefits of the salsa.

D. Guides can help you make healthier meal choices

Many fast food chains post nutritional information on their websites. Unfortunately, these lists are often confusing and hard to use. Instead you can go to other websites that provide health and nutrition information, but in easier to follow formats. Some even publish comparison downloadable guides or inexpensive pocket guides. Learn how to make a healthier meal selection at your favorite restaurant:

HealthyDiningFinder.com – allows you to search for restaurants offering a selection of healthier menu options and view the nutrition data for selected items. You can search for area restaurants or a specific restaurant.

[Stop & Go Fast Food Nutrition Guide](http://www.fastfoodbook.com) – this guide is particularly convenient and easy to use. Look up any of the major chain restaurants and find out how to make healthier choices. (www.fastfoodbook.com)

There are many websites geared toward how to make healthy choices at restaurants depending on your specific dietary needs, whether it is for diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or weight management.

E. Healthier fast food at burger chains



Figuring out healthier options at your favorite fast food burger chain can be tricky. A typical meal at a burger joint consists of a "sandwich", some fries and a drink, which can quickly come in at over 1700 calories for something like Burger King's Triple Whopper with a large fries and a 16 oz. soda. A better option would be a regular single patty burger, small fries, and water, which is about 500 calories. Alternatively you may enjoy a veggie burger smothered in grilled onion and mushrooms. Or if you want a large beef burger, then skip the fries and soda and have a side salad and water instead.

The Big Burger Chains

Less Healthy choices

1. Double-patty hamburger with cheese, mayo, special sauce, and bacon

Healthier choices

1. Regular, single-patty hamburger without mayo or cheese

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|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Fried chicken sandwich | 2. Grilled chicken sandwich |
| 3. Fried fish sandwich | 3. Veggie burger |
| 4. Salad with toppings such as bacon, cheese, and ranch dressing | 4. Garden salad with grilled chicken and low-fat dressing |
| 5. Breakfast burrito with steak | 5. Egg on a muffin |
| 6. French fries | 6. Baked potato or a side salad |
| 7. Milkshake | 7. Yogurt parfait |
| 8. Chicken “nuggets” or tenders | 8. Grilled chicken strips |
| 9. Adding cheese, extra mayo, and special sauces | 9. Limiting cheese, mayo, and special sauces |

F. Healthier fast food at fried chicken chains



Although certain chains have been advertising “no trans fats” in their food, the fact is that fried chicken can pack quite a fattening punch. According to the restaurant’s nutrition info, just a single Extra Crispy Chicken breast at KFC has a whopping 440 calories, 27 grams of fat, and 970 mg of sodium. A healthier choice is the drumstick, which has 160 calories, 10 grams of fat, and 370 mg of sodium. Alternatively, if you like the breast meat, take off the skin and it becomes a healthy choice at 140 calories, 2 grams of fat, and 520 mg of sodium.

Some tips for making smarter choices at fast food chicken restaurants:

The Big Fried Chicken Chains

Less healthy choices

1. Fried chicken, original or extra-crispy.
2. Teriyaki wings or popcorn chicken
3. Caesar salad
4. Chicken and biscuit “bowl”
5. Adding extra gravy and sauces

Healthier choices

1. Skinless chicken breast without breading
2. Honey BBQ chicken sandwich
3. Garden salad
4. Mashed potatoes
5. Limiting gravy and sauces

G. Healthy fast food: Mexican chains



Fast food chains that specialize in tacos or burritos can be caloric minefields or they can be a good option for finding healthy fast food. Rice, beans, salsa and a few slices of fresh avocado can make a very healthy meal. But adding cheese, sour cream and tortilla chips can turn even a good meal unhealthy. Be sure to also remember portion control since these types of restaurants can have enormous menu items (eat half and take the rest for another meal).

Several chains, like Taco Bell and Baja Fresh, have “healthy” menu options that feature less fat and fresher ingredients.

The Big Taco Chains

Less healthy choices

1. Crispy shell chicken taco
2. Refried beans
3. Steak Chalupa
4. Crunch wraps or gordita-type burritos
5. Nachos with refried beans
6. Adding sour cream or cheese

Healthier choices

1. Grilled chicken soft taco
2. Black beans
3. Shrimp ensalada
4. Grilled “fresco” style steak burrito
5. Veggie and bean burrito
6. Limiting sour cream or cheese

H. Healthy fast food: Sub sandwich chains



Americans love all types of sandwiches: hot, cold, wrapped, foot long. Usually eaten with a salad instead of fries. The ads promote the health benefits of sandwich shops. Easier said than done... studies have found that many people tend to eat more calories per meal at a sub shop than at McDonalds. This may be because people feel so virtuous eating “healthy” like the ads promise, that they reward themselves with chips, sodas, or extra condiments.

You can make healthier choices at a deli or sub shop but you need to use some common sense.

Subs, Sandwich and Deli Choices

Less healthy choices

1. Foot-long sub
2. High-fat meat such as ham, tuna salad, bacon, meatballs, or steak
3. The “normal” amount of higher-fat (Cheddar, American) cheese
4. Adding mayo and special sauces
5. Keeping the sub “as is” with all toppings
6. Choosing white bread or “wraps” which are often higher in fat than normal bread

Healthier choices

1. Six-inch sub
2. Lean meat (roast beef, chicken breast, lean ham) or veggies
3. One or two slices of lower-fat cheese (Swiss or mozzarella)
4. Adding low-fat dressing or mustard instead of mayo
5. Adding extra veggie toppings
6. Choosing whole-grain bread or taking the top slice off your sub and eating it open-faced

I. Healthy Asian food



Asian cultures tend to eat very healthfully, with an emphasis on veggies, and with meat used as a “condiment” rather than being the focus of the meal. Unfortunately, Americanized versions of these ethnic foods tend to be much higher in fat and calories – so caution is needed. But here’s a great tip for all Asian restaurants – use the chopsticks! You’ll eat more slowly, since you can’t grasp as much food with them at one time as you can with your normal fork and knife.

Asian Food Choices

Less healthy choices

1. Fried egg rolls, spare ribs, tempura
2. Battered or deep-fried dishes (sweet and sour pork, General Tso’s chicken)
3. Deep-fried tofu
4. Coconut milk, sweet and sour sauce, regular soy sauce
5. Fried rice
6. Salads with fried or crispy noodles

Healthier choices

1. Egg drop, miso, wonton, or hot & sour soup
2. Stir-fried, steamed, roasted or broiled entrees (Shrimp chow mein, chop suey)
3. Steamed or baked tofu
4. Sauces such as ponzu, rice-wine vinegar, wasabi, ginger, and low-sodium soy sauce
5. Steamed brown rice
6. Edamame, cucumber salad, stir-fried veggies

J. Healthy Italian fast food

The anti-carbohydrate revolution has given Italian food a bad rap, but Italian is actually one of the easiest types of cuisine to make healthy. Stay away from fried, oily or overly buttery, as well as thick crust menu items, and you can keep your diet goals intact.



Watch out for the following terms, which are common culprits of high fat and calories: alfredo, carbonara, saltimbocca, parmigiana, lasagna, manicotti, stuffed (all have heavy amounts of cream and cheese). Generally Italian places have lots of veggies in their kitchen so it's easy to ask to have extra veggies added to your meal.

Italian and Pizza Restaurant Choices

Less healthy choices

1. Thick-crust or butter-crust pizza with extra cheese and meat toppings
2. Garlic bread
3. Antipasto with meat
4. Pasta with cream or butter-based sauce
5. Entrée with side of pasta
6. Fried ("Frito") dishes

Healthier choices

1. Thin-crust pizza with half the cheese and extra veggies
2. Plain rolls or breadsticks
3. Antipasto with vegetables
4. Pasta with tomato sauce and veggies
5. Entrée with side of veggies
6. Grilled ("Griglia") dishes

Note: There is no cooking in this class.