

DINING LEAN

10 Simple Ways to Eat Healthy Eating Out

By Dr. Joanne V. Lichten

The average American does it three times a week and, naturally, we Texans do it even more. We eat out! In Houston and Dallas alone, there are literally thousands of restaurants, from four-star ethnic cuisine to all-American steak and potatoes with 40 miles of fast food drive-throughs in between. Statistics show we're taking advantage of the selection four to five times per week!

Every menu has the potential to be a banquet of nutritious possibilities or a minefield of fat, calories, and cholesterol. Dining lean means knowing the difference so you can keep energy up and weight down when you eat away from home.

1. Take the edge off

You're more likely to overindulge if you go in feeling "starved," so eat an apple, crackers, or a piece of bagel on your way to the restaurant. Thirst is often misinterpreted as hunger. Hot coffee or tea won't be absorbed as quickly as a cool beverage, and alcohol or caffeine can make you more dehydrated, so drink a large glass of ice water while you're waiting for your meal.

Avoid heavy appetizers. Fill up on vegetable or bean soup, a large salad with dressing on the side, or bread without the oil or butter. At your favorite Mexican restaurant, count one gram of fat for each tortilla chip, and resist the temptation to load it with extras. Once you add all the fixings to a platter of nachos, you may as well start your meal with

a whole cheesecake!

2. Fill up on fiber

Five servings a day keep the doctor away, providing a powerful dose of essential vitamins and minerals and naturally aiding in digestion. Even if it's not on the menu, ask for a fresh fruit appetizer and a large portion of vegeta-

bles (hold the butter!) with your dinner.

3. Power up with protein, calm down with carbs

Start the day with an energizing, high-protein breakfast including Eggbeaters, cottage cheese, or Canadian bacon. For lunch, go for the lean chicken or beef, beans, tofu, or Gardenburger. End the day with Mother Nature's sedative; a relaxing evening meal featuring plenty of cereal, rice, potatoes, noodles, and/or bread.

4. Avoid hidden fat and calories

Be careful of gimmicky nutritional recommendations unless specific fat and calorie counts are given. Even fat-free or "heart smart" low-cholesterol items can be laden with sugar. That "healthy" oat bran muffin may actually be more fattening than a chocolate éclair! That "vinaigrette" is still Italian dressing; up to 2/3 oil with 75 calories per tablespoon, and most places put on three tablespoons or more.

5. The secret's in the sauce!

Pasta is fairly low in calories and fat, until you add

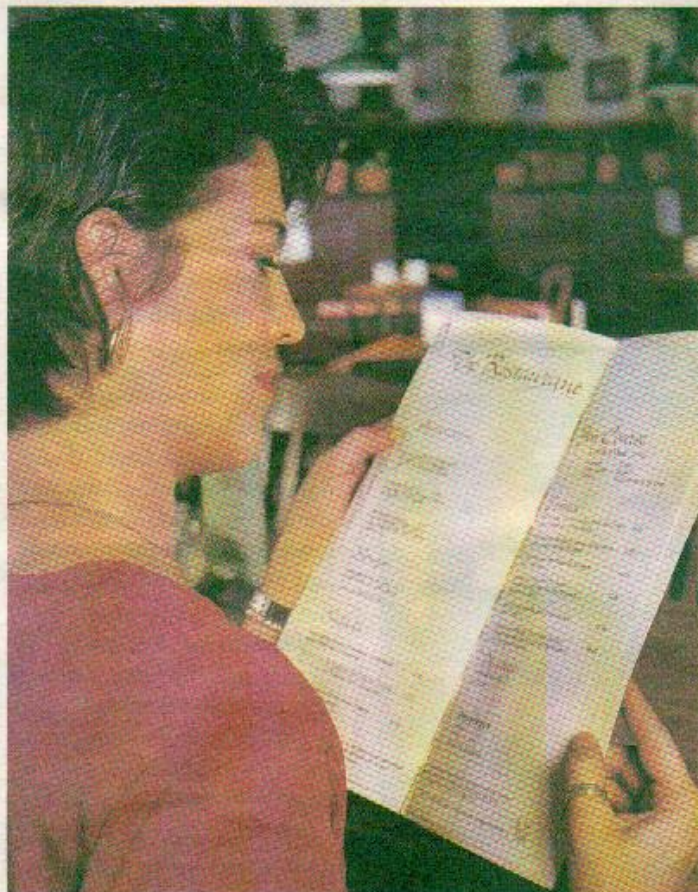


PHOTO LEFT SHOT ON OCCASION AT SPARKLE & MACHINES

auce, meat, and cheese. Your best bets are tomato sauce, red clam sauce, or bolognese. Highest in fat are Carbonara, Alfredo, Creamy Tomato sauce, or Pesto. If you absolutely can't resist the richer varieties, specify half the sauce when you order.

6. As they said in "Godzilla," size does matter

Unless they're volunteering to do your sit-ups later, don't leave portion control up to the kitchen. Take half of that Texas-size sirloin home for tomorrow's lunch, split a side order or dessert with your dining partner, and forget what mom said about cleaning your plate. Most restaurants serve portions in excess of what you really need. Sometimes, it's either "waste" or "waist!" Mom will forgive you if you make the healthy choice to eat only as much as you're genuinely hungry for.

If your server hasn't yet cleared away your plate, eliminate the temptation to keep nibbling by heavily salting leftover food, covering it with your napkin, or setting the plate on an empty table nearby.

7. Little things mean a lot!

A salad with more calories than a burger? Yes! Dressings, mayo, and oil add about 100 calories per tablespoon, and that decorative deep-fried tortilla shell sabotages your health-conscious lunch with a crackling 420 calories and 30 grams of fat! Two tablespoons of cheese add 100 calories and 8 fat grams; a dollop of sour cream and a small helping of guacamole bump it up another 100 calories with an additional 10 grams of fat.

Ask for condiments on the side, and opt for naturally fat

free extras like salsa or pico de gallo. Just five calories per tablespoon; you can burn that much off listening to the mariachi band!

8. Speak up!

We all know beef has more fat and calories than chicken, but the method of preparation has a much bigger impact. On average, Kung Po Chicken serves up 30-40 percent more fat and calories than Beef and Broccoli.

Some restaurants use as much as a quarter cup of oil (500 calories!) to stir-fry an otherwise fat-free serving of vegetables, unless you ask the chef to use broth, a non-stick spray, or as little oil as possible. (Have him hold the chow mein noodles while he's at it. That crunch isn't worth 250 calories and 11 grams of fat per half cup!)

To make them glisten, steaks, fish, and chicken breasts are typically brushed with butter or oil, unless you specifically say not to. Ask to have your hamburger bun "dry" instead of grilled with butter. Request "less meat, more veggies" in your omelet. Order a *la carte* so you're not tempted to eat the extras. Remember, you're the customer. Even most fast food restaurants are happy to let you "have it your way."

9. Play with your food

If the entrée you ordered isn't quite the menu-savvy selection you thought it would be, customize it! Trimming visible fat, removing skin, scraping off breading or sauce, and draining excess butter or oil can significantly reduce the fat content and calories.

10. Treat yourself right

Research has shown that deprivation often leads to

rebound bingeing and weight gain, and let's face it, a carrot stick just ain't the same as a chocolate chip cookie! Sometimes a diet soda is enough to quell a craving for sweets, but sometimes there's no substitute for the real McCoy.

The great thing about indulging in the occasional decadence when you're out to eat is that the rest of the pie, cake, or ice cream isn't there to "haunt" you. If you have a whole box of low fat cookies at home, you'll more than likely end up eating the whole box—a whopping 1,200 calories or more!

Why not finish off your meal with a no-calorie cup of black coffee and a soppapillo with honey (about 160 calories and five grams of fat) or half cup

serving of flan (290 calories, eight grams of fat.) Fitness is in your future when you opt for the fat free, 30-calorie fortune cookie!

So many choices, so little fat! Whether you're eating out for business, pleasure, or as a necessary part of your busy lifestyle, Texas is a great place for dining lean!

Author and speaker Joanne V. Lichten, PhD, RD, has been featured on Fox's "On Health" and CNN's "Accent Health." Her latest book, "Dining Lean: How to eat healthy in your favorite restaurants" was selected as one of the top 10 books of 1998 by the University of Texas Lifetime Health Newsletter and is available in bookstores or by calling 281-955-LEAN.

Fit Food Fast!

Don't drive away from the drive-through loaded with extra fat and calories. Here are Dr. Joanne's picks for the healthiest meals on wheels.

Best Breakfast Bets

McDonald's Egg McMuffin

McDonald's Hotcakes with syrup only

Jack in the Box Breakfast Jack

sub), Turkey Breast (6" sub), Roast Beef, or Club

Wendy's Garden Ranch Chicken or Garden Veggie Pita without dressing

What A Burger Chicken or Beef Fajita, Grilled Chicken Sandwich w/out dressing

Leaner Lunches

Burger King BK Broiler without mayo or Mustard Whopper Jr.

Captain D's Broiled Fish Lunch, Broiled Shrimp Lunch, Broiled Chicken Lunch

Carl Jr.'s BBQ Chicken Sandwich, Chargrilled Chicken Salad-to-Go

Dairy Queen Homestyle Hamburger, Grilled Chicken Fillet Sandwich

Hardee's Grilled Chicken Sandwich, Hot Ham 'N' Cheese Sandwich

Jack in the Box Chicken Fajita Pita, Chicken Teriyaki Bowl

Subway Veggie Delite (6"

Savvy Suppers

Chick-fil-A Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich or Salad Plate plus Hearty Breast or Chicken Soup

Boston Market 1/4 white meat chicken (w/out skin or wing), steamed vegetables, and new potatoes

KFC Tender Roast, Chicken Breast without skin, green beans, and corn on the cob

Arby's Light Turkey Deluxe, Light Chicken Deluxe, and Light Roast Beef Deluxe