



NEWS RELEASE

May 2003

By Anna Martin
Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor
UCCE San Joaquin County

Eating Well When Eating Out

How healthy is your diet? You can't answer that question just by checking your shopping list for low-fat milk and whole-wheat bread. If you're a typical American, you eat a third of your calories away from home—at restaurants, snack bars, cafeterias, shopping malls, movie theaters, and elsewhere. The meals or snacks that used to be an occasional splurge have now become part of our daily diets. And that means trouble. Who knows what you get when you eat out?

At home, you may use only lower-fat cheese, ham, mayonnaise, and tub margarine, but your usual sandwich shop may not bother. At home, you may sauté your vegetables, potatoes, or fish in olive or canola oil, but your favorite restaurant may use a slab of hydrogenated shortening. At home, you can check the label on a frozen lasagna, but the lasagna served by your local Italian trattoria comes with none. So how can you eat well when eating out?

Before You Order:

If you're familiar with the menu, decide what you'll order before you enter the restaurant. If you're trying a new place, take some time to study the menu. This will help you avoid making split-second - and often regrettable - decisions. If your companions don't mind, have the server remove unneeded temptations, such as bread and butter or salsa and chips.

Ordering Advice:

Order first and you'll be less likely to be swayed by your dining partner's choices. Make a few simple requests to get healthful meals. Don't be shy. Ask the server to substitute low-fat foods for high-fat ones. For example, ask for steamed vegetables in place of French fries or fresh fruit salad in place of mayonnaise-laden coleslaw. Order vegetable side dishes if none are included with your meal. Ask the chef to prepare your food with very little butter or oil or none at all. If virtually everything on the menu is high in fat, ask the server whether the chef could prepare a fruit or vegetable platter for you. For dessert, order sorbet or fresh fruit without whipped cream.

Time to Eat:

At the start of the meal, decide how much you will eat. If necessary, request a take-out container and remove the extra food from your plate before you start eating. Did you choose the salad bar? Remember, salad bars can be friend or foe, depending on what you select. Choose fresh greens, raw vegetables, fresh fruits, garbanzo beans and low-fat dressing. Avoid grated cheeses, cream dressings, chopped eggs, croutons, marinated salads, and fruit salads with whipped cream. If you ordered a chicken dish, don't eat the skin. That's where almost all the fat is! If you're eating meat, remove all visible fat.

Bon Appetit!

Source: American Heart Association. *Heart Healthy Tips for Dining Out.*

http://www.deliciousdecisions.org/oa/eat_tips_main.html;

B. Liebman and J. Hurlley. *Rate Your Restaurant Diet.* Nutrition Action Health Letter, March 2001.

<http://www.cspinet.org/nah/quiz/index.html>