



The **Ingredient** Guru

It's not just **what** you eat. It's **what's in** what you eat.

# EATING OUT EATING HEALTHY

GUIDELINES FOR BEGINNERS



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# EATING OUT EATING HEALTHY

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# EATING OUT EATING HEALTHY

## Introduction

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Eating out is meant to be a pleasurable experience. It's something that many of us do on a regular basis. There is a wide variety of foods and restaurant styles available, from fast casual to premier dining, Mexican, Chinese, Thai, Ethiopian, American, Greek... all kinds of choices to enhance your dining experience.

**1970 - 25.9%** of food dollars were spent on fast food

**2012 - 43.1%** of food dollars were spent on fast food

Since 1970 spending on outside-of-home eating options have increased sharply, and caloric intake has risen dramatically across the entire spectrum of daily eating. In fact some studies show that as many as one in five breakfasts is from fast food sources. And one study, noted but not published, indicated that nearly 20% of our meals are actually eaten in the car.

Because many away-from-home options tend to be energy- (calorie) rich and nutrient-poor, this trend has contributed to expanding waistlines. Restaurants, in spite of marketing language and regardless of whether they are fast casual or high-end, prepare and serve the foods that they know will appeal to customers. Frequently this means high levels of fat, salt, sugar, and calories as well as portion sizes that are excessive.

Studies have found a positive link between dietary habits and obesity. One study published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical activity found that *eating at "fast food" restaurants was positively associated with ... a high fat diet and Body Mass Index (BMI). It was negatively associated with vegetable consumption and physical activity.*

But it doesn't have to be that way. You CAN still eat out, enjoy the experience, and have a healthy meal doing it.

While eating whole food choices at home is certainly the best way to ensure nutrient dense, healthy meals, it doesn't mean you can't eat outside the home.



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Enjoying good food, often in the company of others is a wonderful thing. But it is important to remember that eating out can bring about nutritional pitfalls, challenges that occur because we do not think about our food choices or how we eat. When eating out, it's important to understand a few simple concepts that will help you stick to your nutritional plan and allow you to achieve your health goals. Being aware of these concepts in advance helps you to be prepared, to plan ahead, so that you can enjoy your meal without worrying about the menu.

Regardless of the style of restaurant or type of cuisine, always try to choose whole foods and the least processed options possible.

## General Guidelines

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These guidelines are important. Even though some of them may seem like small things, they all add up to extra calories and extra pounds. By following these guidelines you'll still have the opportunity to enjoy your meal and your dining experience, but you'll be eating healthier and feeling better.



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Avoid all-you-can-eat buffets or steakhouses. These restaurants frequently encourage you to overeat so you feel like you are “getting your money’s worth.” But no amount of savings is worth the somewhat-guilty feeling that goes along with over-eating ... not to mention that uncomfortable, overstuffed feeling.



One of the best things you can do for yourself is to look at the menu before you get to the restaurant. Many restaurants have their menus available on an app or online. With computers and smart phones it's easy to look at what they offer so that you can be prepared to make smart decisions when you get there. Make your selection before you get to the restaurant and are possibly overwhelmed or sidelined by smells, setting, or specials. Can't find a healthy option? Consider going to a different restaurant.

Skip the bread or chips basket. If the server brings it, ask them to remove it from the table. This way you can avoid filling up on simple carbs and still enjoy your meal.

Order soup, a small salad, and an appetizer,



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or two appetizers and a small salad in place of an entree. Often you'll find these smaller meals satisfying and filling. The portions are reasonable – they provide just the right amount of food, and you won't overeat.

Remember that low carb does not mean low calorie. Restaurants may choose to add fat or sugars to enhance the flavor but boosting the calorie count. Share the entree with a friend and get an extra side order of vegetables. Even if some restaurants have a plate charge for sharing, it's still worth it if it helps you avoid the pitfalls of over-ordering (and over-eating).

## Ruby Tuesday

### Nutrition summary:

Calories  
912

Fat  
71g

Carbs  
7g

Protein  
61g

There are 912 calories in 1 serving of Ruby Tuesday Rib Eye.



Ask for your salad dressing on the side. This allows you to be in charge of how much dressing you use. You may find that dipping your fork into the dressing and then into your salad provides just enough dressing. Tempted to skip the dressing? Don't. Many of the vitamins in your salad are fat-soluble. This means they need a little fat for your body to be able to properly absorb them.



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Bump up your salad. Many restaurants now allow you to pick a salad and add grilled chicken or fish. It's even possible to get a hamburger patty on top of a salad. There may be a modest up-charge but it's worth it. This is a great way to add some protein to a salad and turn it into a truly satisfying meal.

It's best to bypass the creamy dressings. Choose vinaigrettes or oil and vinegar instead. If you don't want vinaigrette, ask for olive oil and lemon juice.

Skip the sugared or glazed nuts and dried fruits on your salad. This is like getting a candy bar with your salad, which can really pack a caloric punch. Additionally, these added sugars are an unhealthy, nutrient-poor choice. Most restaurants are happy to leave these off if you ask.

If the meal comes with rice, potatoes or French fries, ask to substitute vegetables. You get to skip the simple carbs and enjoy an extra serving of fiber-rich, nutrient-dense vegetables. They're delicious and filling.



Ask for salsa instead of sour cream or butter for your baked potato. This is a tasty way to punch up the flavor while avoiding extra fat calories.

Choose baked, grilled, dry-sauté, broiled, poached, or steamed foods. These methods use less fat and allow more of the flavor to come through.

Ask if your grilled protein or vegetables can be prepared "light" with only a little butter or oil. Avoiding the heavy, often high salt, sauces helps to reduce the fat and sodium in your entrée while highlighting the flavor of your meal.

Choose unsweetened tea or water with lemon instead of soft drinks or alcohol. These healthy, hydrating, and refreshing beverage choices have little to no calories and are still delicious. Plus the often-unlimited refills on soda can add up to quite a few calories (or an overload of artificial sweetener).



VS



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Take half of your meal home. Most restaurant servings are overly large; ask the server for a container at the beginning of the meal so that you can box it up right away to remove it from temptation. Or plan ahead and bring your own environmentally friendly container with you.

Skip dessert – most restaurant desserts are very high in sugar and fat. If you're still hungry by the time you get home have some fresh fruit. You can always add a tablespoon of plain yogurt and a drizzle of honey for a sweet treat.

If you must have dessert, remember the Three Polite Bite Rule. Taking just three bites allows you to savor a sweet treat without overindulging.





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## Gratitude for Your Food

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“We tend to fuel our bodies the way we fuel our cars. Stop. Gas. Go.” *Dr. Liz Lipski*



Part of enjoying the experience of eating out is to practice mindful eating. Unfortunately most of us don't do that. When we slow down, take a breath, and focus on our food, we can really center ourselves and be more aware of what and how we eat.

Take just a moment to express gratitude for the people, animals, and nature that have made the meal possible. Digestion actually starts with our eyes and our mind. Yet all too often we gobble our food quickly and rush off, sometimes barely tasting or registering the food we have just eaten. Plus when we eat quickly we often overeat. And there's nothing worse than that overstuffed, guilty feeling.

Eating quickly also doesn't allow us to properly chew and digest our food. When we take the time to enjoy our food and the company of those we are sharing it with, not only are we less prone to overeat, we are also nourished by what we have consumed physically, emotionally, and mentally. The meal is more memorable and satisfying.



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It's important to remember that the process of learning to make healthy choices when eating out is a step-by-step endeavor. It's not about being perfect; it's about committing to making different choices, one choice at a time. Eating out does not give us the same options as when we cook at home. So we do our best to choose to eat well each time. Each time we eat out we have the opportunity to support and nourish our body.

At this point you may be feeling a little overwhelmed. This is all a lot of information to remember, especially if you're just learning how to make healthier choices. It may seem challenging to try to make massive changes to your eating habits all at once. Rather than trying to change everything at once, start simple. Choose those things you know you can implement right now. Once you've mastered those, add in other healthy eating habits.

To make it easy to get started use the wallet card below. Cut it out and take it with you for a simple and convenient way to remember these strategies:

Remove the bread/chip basket  
Soup+salad+appetizer instead of an entree  
Two appetizers instead of an entree  
Share an entree and get a side of vegetables  
Salad dressing on the side  
Bump up your salad with an added protein  
Vinaigrette or oil & vinegar instead of creamy dressing  
Vegetables instead of rice, potatoes or French fries  
Salsa on your baked potato  
Baked, grilled, dry-sauté, broiled, poached or steamed is best  
Ask for "grilled light"  
Choose unsweetened tea or water with lemon  
Skip dessert or take only Three Polite Bites  
Take half your meal home  
Practice mindful eating

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## Restaurant Choices

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While there is no cut-and-dried rule when eating out, most cuisines have healthier options. While it certainly is possible to dine out and choose organic, pastured options, that is not the norm. After all, unless they clearly mark it on the menu, most restaurants do not serve organic, pasture-raised meats and dairy or free-range organic eggs. And truthfully, for some that level of dining out may be beyond the budget. However, not everyone starts there, and that certainly doesn't mean you can't ever eat out.

It's important to remember that everyone needs to start somewhere. This book is meant to provide a starting point to understand which choices are better for you. It's the first step towards making informed decisions about what you eat.

Within each type of cuisine there are some general guidelines to follow. But you are not limited to the specific foods and cooking styles listed below. Apply what you've learned in the preceding section to make good substitutions.

Remember to skip the simple carbohydrates (white rice, pasta, or breads), order baked or grilled instead of fried foods, avoid fatty sauces and dressings, etc. These choices all add up to a healthier meal and a healthier you.

While there are lots of options within each cuisine, the charts on the following pages represent a great starting point for healthy guidelines.



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## Asian

Asian foods such as Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and Indonesian offer a lot of steamed or stir-fried choices. This is much better than deep-fried. This cuisine also tends to offer a lot of vegetables, a delicious and healthy choice.

Instead of	Ask for
White or fried rice, noodles (lo mein, mei fun, chow mein, pan fried)	Brown rice
Eggrolls, spare ribs, or tempura	Steamed dumplings, soup
Sweet and sour, General Tso's chicken, kung pao, or other fried meats	Steamed, roasted or broiled items
Fried tofu	Skip the tofu
Salads with fried or crispy noodles	Skip the fried noodles and/or have cucumber or seaweed salad



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## BBQ

Who doesn't love a good barbecue? While certainly tasty, all those fatty, fried side dishes and all that sweet tea can add up the calories and unhealthy fats when it comes to eating out. Choose the lighter side of BBQ; it's just as delicious and a whole lot healthier.

Instead of	Ask for
Soft drinks or sweet tea	Water or unsweetened tea
Spare ribs	Baby back ribs (and have just 1-2 ribs instead of a half or full rack)
Half a chicken	3-4 ounces of smoked turkey
Cheesy potatoes	Coleslaw or salad
White sauce (mayo base) or red sauce (ketchup base with added molasses)	Mustard sauce or vinegar sauce



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## Breakfast

We love eating breakfast! Now a number of restaurants serve breakfast all day. With a few simple changes it can be a healthy meal option anytime of day.

Instead of	Ask for
White toast, bagel, croissant, pastry, muffin	Skip the bread products all together
Pancakes with syrup	Have eggs or hot cereal for a great start to your day
Cold cereal, including granola	Hot cereal= oatmeal, or grits, no added sugar (fresh fruit and berries are ok)
Fried eggs	Omelette, scrambled eggs, poached eggs
Processed meats (bacon, sausage, etc.) are high in preservatives	
Fruit cocktail	Fresh fruit
Hash browns	Sautéed veggies



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## Fast Food

This is the least healthy choice when eating out. These foods are made from poor-quality products and laden with fats, trans-fats, and chemicals. If you have no other option there are a few choices that are at least moderately less unhealthy.

Instead of	Ask for
Fried food or sandwiches	Grilled food or sandwiches – see if you can skip the bread
Deluxe, double or supersize burger	Junior or regular burger – see if you can skip the bun
Soft drinks or sweet tea	Water or unsweetened tea
Special sauce, cheese, mayonnaise, bacon, gravy	Mustard, ketchup, pickles
French fries, onion rings	Baked potato or side salad (oil and vinegar dressing)
Milkshake	Yogurt parfait
Chicken nuggets	Grilled chicken strips



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## Italian

Generally considered in the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, Italian food can still pack a punch when it comes to creamy sauces and cheese-laden pasta dishes. Choose lighter fare and enjoy the delicious flavors without weighing yourself down.

Instead of	Ask for
Mozzarella sticks, fried zucchini	Bruschetta, insalata caprese
Deep dish pizza	Thin crust – (ask for whole wheat if available). Have only 1 slice and lots of delicious veggies on the side
Creamy sauces	Tomato sauces
Parmigiana, fried (Frito), or cheese-smothered dishes	Grilled (griglia) entrees





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## Mexican

A few simple substitutions will allow you to enjoy the spices and fresh flavors of Mexican cuisine without all of the fat that comes with fried foods.

Instead of	Ask for
Refried beans	Black or pinto beans
Sour cream	Salsa, pico de gallo, cilantro
Flour or fried tortillas	Corn tortillas
Fried beef or pork (Carnitas) or sausage (Chorizo)	Grilled fish or chicken
Enchiladas, quesadillas, chimichangas, or chilis rellenos	Fajitas or corn tortilla tacos
Chalupas	Taco or fajita salad (don't eat the fried taco shell), grilled "fresco" burritos
Crunchy wraps or gorditas	Veggie and bean burritos

Avoid loaded nachos and anything marked "grande"



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## Sandwich Shops

Often seen as a quick and easy option, sandwiches tend to come with a lot of carbs because of all of that bread. Many sandwich shops are now offering a salad option; consider this instead (and skip the chips and the cookie). If it's available, have a piece of fruit to go with your sandwich/salad instead.

Instead of	Ask for
Foot long sub	Six-inch sub
Fatty meats (ham, tuna salad, bacon, meatballs, steak) or cheesesteak	Lean meats (roast beef, chicken breast) or veggies
High fat cheeses (cheddar, American)	Low fat cheeses (Swiss, mozzarella, provolone)
Mayo or "special" sauces	Low-fat dressing or mustard
White bread or wrap	Whole grain bread (take the top off to eat the sandwich open-faced)



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## Resources

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Want to know what's really in your food? In addition to reading this book so you can make healthy choices when you eat out, you need to have good resources at hand. Connect with me to stay on top of what's really in (and on) your food.

Sign up for Mira's newsletter  
**"Food News You Can Use"**

Buy a copy of *The Pantry Principle*

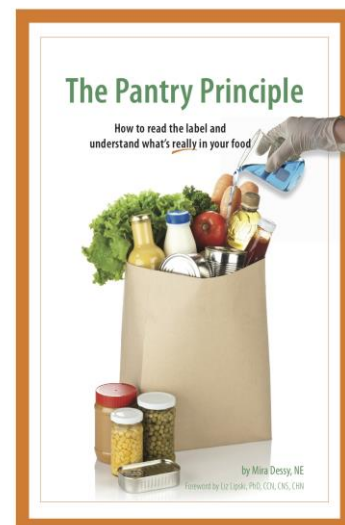
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Pinterest [www.pinterest.com/MiraDessy](http://www.pinterest.com/MiraDessy)



Mira Dessy, The Ingredient Guru, is a holistic nutritionist, a popular public speaker, and the author of *The Pantry Principle: How to read the label and understand what's really in your food*. She is a member of the National Association of Nutrition Professionals, the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, and the American Holistic Health Association. She speaks frequently on how to navigate the grocery store's mammoth packaged food stock, decipher confusing food labels, understand the relationship of food additives to poor health, and to find real food. She believes it's not just what you eat, but what's in what you eat. Her motto is "Eat well to be well."



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