Worksheet 9-1 Restaurant Eating Tips

Restaurant eating can be a challenge if you are trying to change your eating habits. But don't worry—it is possible to make healthy food choices if you know what to look and ask for!

The following strategies and questions will help guide you in your future menu selections. Remember, the more questions you ask, the more knowledgeable you become about the food choices and the easier the choice becomes.

1. Plan ahead

- Call ahead of time to ask about low-calorie choices and plan your meal before going to the restaurant.
- “Bank” calories (i.e., eat fewer calories during other meals that day or on the previous day so you have additional calories for your meal out).
- Eat something small before you go to the restaurant to prevent you from being ravenous when you get there.

2. Ask for what you want. Take charge!

- Ask the server not to bring the bread, chips, or other “freebies” to the table.
- Ask about the method of preparation. Are they using oil or butter to cook the food?
- If the method of preparation is high in calories, ask if you can modify it to reduce the calories and/or fat. For example, can food be prepared without added fat such as butter or oil?
- Order salad dressing, gravy, sauce, and other spreads that tend to be high in calories “on the side.”
- Ask if you can split the meal without an extra charge.
- Consider ordering an appetizer or children’s size portion rather than the full-size entree.
- Ask if you can order food à la carte (separately) rather than as a full meal.
- Ask if you can substitute lower calorie items such as a salad or baked potato for high-calorie foods like French fries.
- Look for ways to reduce the amount of high-calorie foods in the entree. For example, can they put less cheese on the pizza?
- See if the menu offers “light,” “low-fat,” or healthy items.
- If it isn’t listed on the menu, ask if the restaurant has calorie, fat, and portion size information available upon request.
- Ask that your plate be removed from the table as soon as you finish.
- Before or after the meal, put the amount of food that you don’t want to eat in a “to go” container to take home.
3. Choose foods carefully

- Think about what parts of the meal are most worth your calories.

4. Limit alcohol

- Drinking alcohol may lead to less control over eating.
- Drinking alcohol also reduces the number of calories that can be spent on food.

5. Use portion control for high-calorie foods. Watch out for these potentially high-calorie words on menus:

- Au gratin
- Breaded
- Buttered, buttery
- Cheese sauce
- Creamy, cream sauce
- Fried (deep-, pan-, batter)
- Gravy
- Southern style
- Hollandaise
- Parmesan
- Pastry
- Rich
- Sautéed
- Scalloped
- Seasoned