

Eating Out

Applicable to: Nurses, Physicians and Other Health Professionals

Recommendations

Individuals should limit the frequency of eating out because restaurant portions are large, and are high in calories, fat, sugar and salt.

When eating out:

- Choose foods from at least 3 of the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives and Meat and Alternatives.
- Choose entrees that include vegetables or fruit.
- Be aware that the portions served in a restaurant are often much larger and higher in calories than you would eat at home. To keep from overeating:
 - Try not to leave home hungry
 - Share an entrée, or choose seniors' or children's portions.
 - When served larger servings, consider asking for half of the portion to be packaged before it is served.
- At a buffet, aim for a healthy plate: $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate Vegetables and Fruit, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate Grain Products and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate Meat and Alternatives, plus 1 serving of Milk and Alternatives.
- Choose lower fat items instead of higher fat and deep fried foods whenever possible.
- Request that added fats be served on the side (for example, salad dressing, creamy sauces, sour cream, gravy and butter/margarine) and limit the amount added to food.
- Choose lower sodium options and request that foods be prepared with little or no salt.
- Minimize intake of beverages and foods with added sugars.
- If available, review the restaurant's nutrition information before making menu selections.

Health Benefits

Following the recommendations above can help to achieve healthy eating while eating out:

- Promotes optimal growth and development in children and adolescents.¹
- Minimizes the risk of nutrient-related chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease (CVD), type 2 diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis, obesity and certain cancers.²
- Promotes and maintains a healthy weight when combined with active living.¹

Key Questions**What is Canada's Food Guide?¹**

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide is a tool that defines and promotes healthy eating. It can be used as a guide when eating out. The eating pattern in Canada's Food Guide includes foods from each of the four food groups:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Grain Products
- Milk and Alternatives
- Meat and Alternatives

The Food Guide also includes a small amount of added oils and fats. The Guide recommends the number of Food Guide servings individuals should eat from each of the four food groups. Additionally, Canada's Food Guide encourages people to choose foods lower in fat, sugar and salt.

Nutrition Guideline

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For Professional Reference Only

How can the amount of vegetables and fruit be increased when dining out?

Canada's Food Guide recommends:

	Children 2-13 years old	Teens 14-18 years old	Adults > 19 years old
Vegetables and Fruit: recommended number of servings daily	4-6	7-8	7-10

Research has shown that eating the recommended amounts of vegetables and fruit reduces the risk of heart disease, cancer² and stroke.³

One serving is:

- 1 medium fresh vegetable or fruit, or roughly the size of a tennis ball
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) of raw or cooked vegetables or fruits, or roughly the size of a hockey puck
- 1 cup (250 mL) of leafy vegetables, or roughly the size of a baseball
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) of 100% fruit juice

Strategies to meet the recommendation for vegetable and fruit intake while eating out:

- Try to eat 1 or 2 servings with every meal. Aim for half a plate vegetables and fruit.
- Have fresh fruit, fruit salad or 100% juice (limit to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup [125 mL]) with breakfast.
- Have lettuce, tomato and other vegetables on sandwiches.
- Have a vegetable or tomato-based soup as a meal or an appetizer.
- Have a tossed salad or raw vegetables with low fat dressing on the side as an appetizer.
- Request extra vegetables on pizza or in a favorite dish, if possible.
- Have fruit for dessert.

Refer to Guideline: Vegetable and Fruit Intake

Why should individuals limit the frequency of eating out?

Canadians spend more of their food dollars eating in restaurants now than in the past (30 cents per food dollar in 2001, compared to 25 cents per food dollar in 1982)⁴ Eating outside the home (e.g. fast-food restaurants, non-fast food restaurants, take-out, ordering in) more frequently (two or more times per week) is associated with higher weight and greater calorie intake.^{5,6,7}

Many restaurant and fast food meals offer much larger portions than they did a few decades ago.^{5,8,9,10,11} As portion sizes of meals and snacks increase, studies show that it becomes increasingly difficult to estimate how much is being eaten. As well, the larger the portion size, the more likely one is to eat more without realizing how much one has eaten.^{12,13,14}

How can individuals avoid overeating when dining out?

Tips to help lower calorie intake when dining out are:⁷

- Share meals with someone else. Restaurants often give more food than one would eat at home.
- Avoid fried appetizers, side dishes and entrees.
- Aim for $\frac{1}{2}$ plate of vegetables and fruit. This can lower the total calories of a meal.

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- Ask for leftovers to be packed up. The leftovers can be eaten at another meal.
- Don't go out to eat when really hungry. Eat a piece of fruit an hour before going out to help decrease hunger. Going out hungry increases the likelihood of overeating.
- Consider a tossed salad with low fat dressing on the side as a starter course.
- Limit eating out to 2 times per week or less.
- Reduce intake of beverages with added sugars.
- Check nutrition information online to look for lower calorie choices.

When eating at a buffet it can be difficult to control portions due to the increased variety of foods offered and chosen. In addition to the tips above:

- Aim for a healthy plate: $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate Vegetables and Fruit, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate Grain Products and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate Meat and Alternatives, plus 1 serving of Milk and Alternatives.

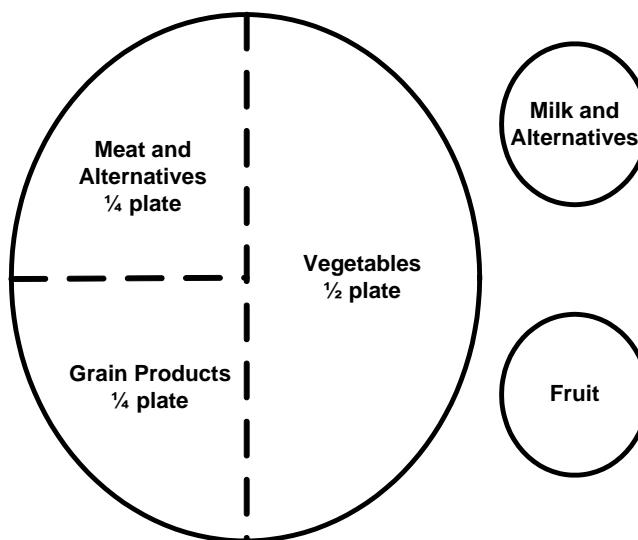
Refer to Guidelines: Portion Sizes; Food and Drinks High in Calories, Fat, Sugar or Salt; Pediatric Weight Management; Adult Weight Management

What does a healthy meal look like when eating out?

A healthy meal when eating out will include one food from at least three of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide.

To build a healthy meal:

- fill $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate with Vegetables
- fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate with Meat and Alternatives
- fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of the plate with Grain Products
- have 1 serving of Milk and Alternatives
- have fruit on the side



Using this healthy meal model may help with portion control while eating out, and will help to meet recommended servings from the four food groups.

How can the amount of fat consumed be reduced when dining out?

Restaurant food is often high in fat. Foods high in fat include those that are fried, deep fried, battered or breaded and dishes made with large amounts of butter/margarine or oil, whole milk, cream, cream cheese or are "au gratin."

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Canada's Food Guide recommends including 2 to 3 Tbsp (30 to 45 mL) of unsaturated fat each day. This includes oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise. In addition, the Food Guide recommends choosing foods lower in fat and foods prepared with little or no added fat.¹

To help lower the fat content of a meal when eating out:

- Ask questions. The server can usually provide information on how the food is made and what ingredients are in the dish.
- Ask for healthier cooking methods or substitute higher fat foods for healthier choices.
- Choose foods that are poached, barbecued, baked, grilled, roasted, broiled or stir fried instead of those that are fried, deep fried, battered, breaded or in creamy sauce.
- Choose soups made with broth or lower fat milk products instead of soups made with whole milk or cream.
- Choose foods flavored with spices and herbs (no sauce) or tomato-based sauce instead of those made with cream or cheese sauces, or "au gratin".
- Request a garden salad, fruit, baked potato or rice instead of salad with dressing already added, French fries or hash browns. Request salad dressings on the side to control how much is added.
- Don't add butter, margarine, gravy, or creamy sauces to food at the table.
- Request non-hydrogenated margarine instead of butter.

Refer to Guidelines: Heart Healthy; Food and Drinks High in Calories, Fat, Sugar or Salt; Planning Healthy Meals and Snacks

How can the amount of salt consumed be reduced when dining out?

Restaurant foods are often high in salt (sodium). Dishes may be high in salt as salt and ingredients high in salt are added to many dishes when being prepared. A decrease in dietary sodium has been shown to decrease blood pressure in both hypertensive and non-hypertensive individuals.

A daily intake of less than 2300 mg sodium is recommended for most adults.^{15,16} The closer an individual can get to a daily intake of 1500 mg the better.¹⁵ Lower intakes are recommended for adolescents and children.¹⁵

Strategies to decrease sodium intake when eating out:

- Choose foods prepared with little or no salt.
- Avoid adding extra salt to food. Most restaurant meals are already very high in salt.
- Request that part or all of the meal be made without salt.
- Eat smaller portions of foods that are salty.
- If available, review the restaurants' nutrition information. Choose foods with smaller amounts of sodium listed.
- Many sauces, condiments and seasonings contain a lot of salt, such as soy sauce, cheese sauce, ketchup, mustard, pickles and gravies. Instead, try adding lemon juice, vinegar, pepper, or hot sauce to season food - these contain little or no salt.

Refer to Guidelines: Food and Drinks High in Calories, Fat, Sugar or Salt; Heart Healthy; Sodium

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How can the amount of sugar consumed be reduced when dining out?

The main reason to decrease intake of beverages and foods with added sugars is to decrease calorie intake, to minimize weight gain, and consequently reduce risk of cardiovascular disease.^{2,17}

To reduce sugar intake:

- Avoid sweetened beverages (i.e. pop, sweetened juice, iced tea). Try water, milk, 100% juice (limit to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup [125 mL] per day), or sugar-free beverages instead.
- Avoid adding extra sugar to food and beverages.
- Have fresh fruit or fruit salad for dessert instead of cakes, pies, pastries or ice cream.
- Share dessert with a friend.

Refer to Guidelines: Food and Drinks High in Calories, Fat, Sugar or Salt and Heart Healthy

How can individuals find the nutrition information for restaurant foods?

Many restaurants and fast food chains will provide nutrition information about the food items available. Copies of the analysis can be obtained in the restaurant or on the internet.

To find nutrition information on the computer, follow these steps:

- Open an Internet search tool, such as Google™. Type in the restaurant that you want nutrition information for, and click "search". A list of different sites will come up.
- Look for the link to your restaurant choice. Check to see if there is a Canadian site. Click on the link to go to the restaurant home page.
- Look for nutrition information on the home page. This may be listed under a name like: nutrition guide, menu, or nutrition calculator.
- Look for the menu items in question. Note the grams of fat, sugar, fibre and milligrams of sodium in this food.
- Choose food on the menu that has **less fat, sugar and sodium and more fibre**.

How can individuals with a food allergy or intolerance make sure that what they eat is safe?

- Let the server know about the food allergy/intolerance. Ask the server to recommend appropriate dishes to help avoid the food allergen.
- Call ahead and ask if the specific food allergy(s) / intolerance can be accommodated. Some restaurants may be able to accommodate certain allergies or intolerances better than others. For example, certain restaurants offer gluten-free choices for individuals with celiac disease.
- For more information about food allergies, visit the Health Canada website.

Refer to Guidelines: Food Allergies, Gluten-free Diet

Are there any handouts on eating out I can use with my clients?

Refer to approved provincial Alberta Health Services eating out nutrition handouts to support patient education. For more information, contact Nutrition.Resources@albertahealthservices.ca

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