

The fast-paced lifestyle of both parents and kids often makes it difficult for families to sit down for a family dinner at home. Between homework, after school activities and parents' work and family-related responsibilities, families have little time to shop for, prepare and sit down to meals at home. As a result, quick serve dining has become not only a solution for hectic lives but also an integral part of family life.

Parents can be reassured that they can provide their kids with great tasting, high-quality and balanced meals even when dining away from home. With a little thought and care, you don't have to trade great taste and good nutrition for convenience.



Meal time is important family time

The most important part of family meal times is simple - it's the family. Eating meals as a family can actually improve your children's food habits since kids tend to eat more fruits, vegetables and dairy foods at meals shared with their parents.

Shared meals have more subtle and long-lasting effects, too. Children learn by modeling themselves after YOU! Eating together lets you show your children by example how to choose nutritious foods, how to know when they are full and how to try new tastes. They also learn valuable social skills like table manners and conversation. Family meal time can be an important time for talking about the day's events and staying connected with each other. When you go to a quick serve restaurant and have the time, opt to sit down at the restaurant or bring your meal home and enjoy it together at the dinner table.

Even if you're in a hurry, encourage your children to eat a little more slowly. It takes about 20 minutes for the brain to get the message from the stomach that you are no longer hungry. Fast eaters are often overeaters! Slow eaters tend to eat less and still are satisfied.

Follow the Dietary Guidelines

One way for families to enjoy balanced meals together is by following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a set of recommendations from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS), designed to help all Americans choose the foods they need to support good health. The suggestions below will help you follow those guidelines.

Choose a variety of foods from among the basic food groups while staying within calorie needs.

We all need a wide variety of vitamins and minerals to keep our bodies healthy and strong, but it takes a variety of foods to provide all these nutrients. The tricky part is getting variety without overeating. That means choosing foods that are packed with vitamins and minerals at each and every meal. When eating out, balance your meal by choosing from the main food groups: meat, dairy, fruits, vegetables and grains.

Control calorie intake to manage body weight.

Don't eat more calories than you burn because excess calories are stored as body fat. Choose portion sizes that are right for you and balance out your food intake with your physical activity throughout the day.

Be physically active every day.

Regular physical activity helps reduce your risk for chronic disease and can help you control your weight. Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most

Some chains offer freshly made entrée salads that give you "balance in a bowl." For example, entrée salads with chicken, cheese or almonds pack a terrific protein punch along with fiber and vitamins. If you are counting calories, use a low-fat or fat-free dressing or skip some of the extras like croutons.



To increase physical activity, try to schedule activities the whole family can enjoy together, like nature walks, bicycling or practicing soccer drills. Experts suggest 30 minutes of activity almost everyday for adults.

Did you know?

A serving of cut-up fruit or cooked vegetables is a half-cup. A serving of salad greens is one cup. You should get at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day - the more the better!



days to maintain good health and fitness. But increasing physical activity alone is not sufficient. Limit sedentary behaviors like watching TV and sitting at the computer.

Look for salads that have dark, leafy greens as their base. These more colorful greens are an excellent source of essential B vitamins as well as fiber.

Eat more fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are extremely important because they are packed with essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and other compounds that contribute to good health. Colorful fruits and vegetables not only brighten up a meal - they taste good, too.

Get more fruit into your child's diet by ordering a side of fruit such as mandarin oranges in their natural juices. Kids love juicy, bite-sized fruit. You will feel good knowing your child is getting vitamins and minerals, too!

Eat more whole grains and choose more nonfat or low-fat milk or milk products - preferably 3 servings of each per day.

Whole grains - whether wheat, oats, barley, corn or others - are those that have not had the outer layer of the grain

Did you know?

Chili beans are healthy carbs and a great source of fiber! A large bowl of chili gives you 8 grams of dietary fiber, 22 grams of protein, 25% of your daily recommendation for vitamin A and iron, and 15% of your daily recommendation for calcium.



removed. This layer contains fiber, vitamins and minerals. Fiber is important for digestive health. A diet high in fiber also reduces the risk for diabetes, heart disease or certain cancers.

Dairy foods are an excellent source of calcium, provide protein and several other vitamins and minerals important for children's growth and development.

Choose low-fat toppings like lettuce, tomato and onion; condiments like ketchup, mustard or relish; and low-fat or fat-free dressings.

To get more calcium in a typical quick serve meal, order reduced-fat white or low-fat chocolate milk. **OR** Choose dairy-based treats. Options include yogurt, milkshake or frozen dairy dessert.

Calcium is important at all ages, but especially for growing bones! Adults and kids need 3 servings of calcium-rich foods every day.

Choose fats wisely.

Fat is a nutrient, too, but some fats are better for you than others. Try to eat less total fat by reducing your intake of saturated fats. Choose lean meat, chicken and fish and nonfat or low-fat dairy foods. Try to eat more of the good fats like those found in fish and olive oil.

To reduce intake of total and saturated fat, add options like a grilled chicken sandwich to your menu choices. On the side, have a baked potato or salad with low-fat or fat-free dressing.

Choose carbohydrates wisely.

If you are counting carbs, you can order a hamburger or grilled chicken "bun-less." Some quick service restaurants will substitute a salad in place of fries.

Carbohydrate foods ("carbs") like grains, beans, fruits and some vegetables provide the fuel we need to power us throughout the day. But be smart about your choices. Make sure most of the "carbs" you eat have plenty of fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Choose and prepare foods with little salt.

Most Americans eat twice the recommended amount of salt. Although it's difficult to control the amount of salt used to prepare foods you eat outside your home, you can minimize your salt intake by not adding more at the table.

Mix 'n Match

You don't have to settle for prepackaged combination meals. Check to see if your quick serve restaurant will let you pick and choose among their offerings to create your own balanced meal.



When you mix and match, you have more control over your choices. Teaching your children how to make nutritious substitutions not only helps broaden their tastes, but also empowers them with knowledge for a lifetime of better eating habits.

Did you know?

People of all ages THINK they are eating –

- less grain products
- more fruits
- more vegetables
- more milk
- less fats, oils and sweets

– than they ACTUALLY are!



Become nutrition-savvy!

There are many good, free sources of nutrition information to help you make wise food choices for you and your family. Don't be afraid to ask for nutrition information at your quick service restaurant. Take advantage of online Web sites that provide complete nutrition information for all items offered. Some restaurants provide online food calculators that allow you to custom-tailor meals to meet your needs.

Did you know?

Beef is an excellent source of iron in a form that is easily absorbed and used by the body.



Meeting Special Dietary Needs

Chances are, if you or your children have special dietary concerns such as lactose intolerance, food allergies or diabetes, you already are more aware than the average American of foods and their ingredients. You can still enjoy quick serve meals, but you should do your homework first. Visit the Web sites of your favorite quick serve restaurants to learn about choices for people with special dietary needs. There are plenty of options for those on gluten-free diets, those watching their weight, and those with diabetes. If you have food allergies, make sure you are given full disclosure about ingredients. Restaurants that value their customers will provide good information in a user-friendly format.



Why is Iron Important?

Iron is essential for healthy red blood cells, which deliver oxygen to all cells in the body. It's especially important during childhood, adolescence, and the childbearing years.

Choosing a Restaurant When On the Go

It goes without saying that you want good value and delicious-tasting food, served quickly and conveniently in a clean, safe setting. But there also are some other qualities you should look for when choosing a quick serve restaurant:

- Foods should be freshly prepared all day long. Items that are prepared ahead and stored under a heat lamp lose nutrients as well as quality.
- Similarly, salad items that stand exposed to air and light will lose nutrients and quality. Look for a restaurant that prepares your salad for you from fresh ingredients.
- Keep in mind that white meat chicken has less fat than dark meat. If it's skinless, it's even lower in fat.
- Choose restaurants that serve 100% pure ground beef in their patties - lean if possible.
- Seek out menu entrees that are "grilled" - it generally means that the food was prepared with little or no added fat.
- Be sure to choose a restaurant that offers you a wide range of choices: low-fat dressings, nutritious side dishes and items that are baked or grilled.
- Do your research. Some quick serve outlets provide thorough information about all food ingredients - in the restaurants and on their Web sites.
- Make sure your favorite restaurant offers children's portions. Children's menus provide smaller portion sizes and have been designed to provide ample nourishment for smaller bodies.
- Select vibrantly colored fruits and vegetables like dark, leafy greens, tomatoes and mandarin oranges. The pigments that give these foods their color actually have important health benefits!

Sources: Guthrie JF, Lin, BH, Frazao E. Role of food prepared away from home in the American diet, 1977-78 versus 1994-96: changes and consequences. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2002 May-Jun;34(3):140-150. / Kant AK, Graubard BI. Eating out in America, 1987-2000: trends and nutritional correlates. *Prev Med.* 2004 Feb;38(2):243-49. / USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. Consumption of Food Group Servings: People's Perceptions vs. Reality. *Nutr Insights.* 2000 Oct;20. / Videon TM, Manning CK. Influences on adolescent eating patterns: the importance of family meals. *Adolescent Health.* 2003 May;32(5):365-73.

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Eating Better Together

A Guide to Help You and Your Family Make Menu Choices for a Healthier Lifestyle



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About Serving Sizes

- 1 sandwich bun = 2 grain servings
- 1 cup of milk or yogurt = 1 dairy serving
- 2 oz. process cheese = 1 dairy serving
- 1 cup of salad = 1 vegetable serving
- 1/2 cup fruit = 1 serving
- 3 oz. of meat (about the size of a deck of cards) = 1 serving

