

# Nutrition Quarterly

## How to Make Healthier Fast Food Choices

These days everyone is crunched for time, on a budget and searching for convenience. As a result, the intake of fast foods in America has increased. However, eating out can increase your calorie, salt, sugar and fat intake which can lead to weight gain, heart disease and diabetes.

Fast food restaurants offer huge portions, like double-sized fries and sodas, and triple-decker sandwiches. Recent studies found that when people are offered a larger entrée, not only will they eat more of that



entrée, but they will also eat more of the other foods that come with the meal. In fact, you may eat 25% more when you choose a larger portion size. Since many fast foods are loaded with calories, fat, sugar, and salt, that extra 25% can add up to serious health problems. By being a savvy consumer, you can choose healthier options and portion sizes so that you can have your takeout and eat it too!

**Feeling fried?** Fried foods are loaded with saturated fats. Avoid dishes that are battered, crispy, breaded, and tempura-style. Look for grilled, baked, steamed, or lightly sautéed dishes. If you're not sure how a dish is prepared, just ask! Ordering a McDonald's Premium Grilled Chicken Sandwich (without mayo) instead of a 10 piece Chicken McNuggets will save you 19 grams of fat!

**Soup or salad?** Choose a soup or salad with your meal, but avoid creamy soups and full-fat dressings. Burger King's side salad with fat-free ranch dressing has only 75 calories and zero grams of fat.

**Share and share alike.** Most entrées can easily serve two people. If you share with a friend you can create two meals for the price of one. An order of beef with broccoli packs in 900 calories, and that doesn't include rice! Split it in half and add ½ cup of rice (¼ of a typical takeout carton) for a total of 550 calories.



**Portion Distortion.** With restaurant portions being so big, it's easy to load up on fat and calories. You can ask if they will make a half-order of a large dish or you can order off the kids menu. Burger King Chicken Tenders from a Kids Meal are half the size of a regular order at only 170 calories and 10 grams of fat versus 340 calories and 20 grams of fat.

**Use a plate.** You run the risk of overeating when you eat from the carton, so if you are eating take-out food at home, use a plate. Spoon a small portion into the plate and save the rest for another meal.

**Eat your vegetables.** Choose dishes that have a variety. Order a side of veggies (not fried) or a baked potato with your meal instead of French fries or chips. Ask if you can add extra to your favorite dish. Most places, even fast food restaurants, will accommodate your special requests, such as extra lettuce and tomato slices, or extra broccoli in your Chinese food.

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## Smart Snacking

Choosing healthy food is just as important at snack time as it is at mealtime. Incorporating healthy snacks can help maintain your energy level and regulate your appetite, preventing you from being starving by your next meal.

Though snacks can contribute to a healthy diet, they can also be a source of extra calories if not eaten in moderation. Make sure you select foods that contain important nutrients, not empty calories like candy, cakes, soda and chips. Include foods from all food groups such as fruits, vegetables, lean protein and whole

grains. Here are some nutrient packed, low-calorie snack picks:

**Big Bang for your Buck:** 12 baby carrots, 1 cup of chopped cantaloupe/watermelon, 1 cup of gazpacho or 1 cup a nonfat fruit smoothie.

**Combo:** 1 thin wedge of honeydew melon w/ thin slice of lean ham, 5 whole grain crackers topped w/thin sliced cracked pepper turkey or 5 Nabisco Original Wheat Thins topped w/natural peanut butter.

**Crunchy:** 2 cups light microwave popcorn, 11 dry-roasted, no salt, peanuts or 4 low-fat Honey Graham crackers.

**Bottoms up:** 1 cup sparkling water w/splash of juice, 1 cup herbal iced tea or 1 cup low-sodium 100% vegetable juice.

**Mediterranean:** 15 seedless grapes, 7 almonds, 16 cherry tomatoes or 1 1/2 cup chopped cucumber w/oil and lemon juice.

**Sweet:** 1 fig bar, 1/2 cup sorbet, 100% fruit juice pop or 10 frozen grapes.

Source: Klesius, Mike AARP Bulletin October 2007

## Spice it Up!

### Cumin



Cumin, *cuminum cyminum*, comes from a flowering plant native to the eastern Mediterranean region and eastern India. It is associated with North African, Middle Eastern, Indian, Mexican, Western Chinese and Cuban cuisine. It is a major spice found in both curry and chili powder. While not spicy, it does have a nutty, peppery, and even sweet taste. Dried cumin can be sprinkled on lean meats before cooking. You can also add it to soups, sauces, and rice and bean dishes for an extra kick.

Cumin is also used in herbal medicine to treat gas and bloating. Some studies have shown that it may have anti-microbial properties. However, those taking medicines for diabetes should be careful when using cumin as an alternative therapy because it may cause blood sugar to drop too low. It is safe for diabetics to use cumin in cooking.

#### Cumin Tea

This tea may help relieve gas and bloating when you drink it after a meal.

Add 1 teaspoon of whole cumin seeds to boiling water and boil for 5 minutes. Strain and serve warm.

#### Cumin Spice Rub

Makes 14 servings

#### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons ground coriander
- 6 tablespoons ground cumin
- 4 tablespoons hot chili powder
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground allspice
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground black pepper

1. Mix ingredients together and store the extra in a small plastic container or storage bag.

2. Rub 1 tablespoon of this spice mixture on a lean meat of your choice and cook as desired.

Variations: Add a splash of lime juice and a teaspoon of olive oil.

Adapted from: <http://allrecipes.com/Recipe/Cumin-Coriander-Pork-Rub/Detail.aspx>

#### Additional Sources:

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cumin>
2. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database
3. <http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=91>

## Poached Apricots

Serves 8

2 cups cold water  
1/2 cup sugar  
8 fresh apricots, or 16 dried halves  
2 (1-inch) strips lemon zest  
1/2 tsp. vanilla  
1 Tbsp. toasted sliced almonds

In a medium saucepan, combine the sugar with cold water. Bring to a boil and cook until the sugar dissolves.

While the syrup cooks, halve the fresh apricots and remove their pits.

Place the apricots in the boiling syrup. Add the lemon zest. Reduce the heat and simmer the fruit gently for 15 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat. Stir in the vanilla.

Cool the fruit in the syrup. Serve the apricots, with some of the syrup spooned over them, and garnished with the almonds.

Source: Dana Jacobi for the American Institute for Cancer Research



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Call  
212-367-1259  
or  
212-367-1263**

## Fruit of the Quarter: Apricots

An apricot has a similar appearance to a very small peach. It is richly colored, fragrant and sweet. It is a rich source of beta carotene (vitamin A) and fiber. They are also low in calories and taste great poached with a *little* sugar. They can also be dried or made into jam.

Apricots are from China and were introduced to Europe by Alexander the Great. Franciscan friars brought them to California, which produce the largest amount of this crop for the United States.

California apricots are at their peak from May through August. Later in the fall apricots from Idaho appear. Winter fruit from outside the country are not worth buying because they will be hard and woody.

It is best to purchase apricots that are firm. They should be ripened at home by leaving them on the counter for 4 or 5 days. Firm apricots should be gold with no traces of green. A ripe apricot will be gold with a red tint. Avoid apricots that are wrinkled. Don't be deterred from apricots that have small bruises or soft spots. Their extreme tenderness causes them to bruise easily, but these apricots are ripe and sweet. However, you should avoid apricots that are bruised all over. A ripe apricot may be refrigerated, but not longer than a day or two. Like peaches, they dry out quickly in the refrigerator.

Source: Produce Pete, <http://www.producepete.com/shows/apricots.html>



### (Healthier Fast Food Choices)

**Rethink that drink.** Avoid sodas which can pack in empty calories. A 12 oz. can of soda has 140 calories and 10 teaspoons of sugar! If you're craving the flavor, squeeze some lemon or a splash of fruit juice into regular or sparkling water.

**A side note.** Ask for sauces and dressings on the side. This way you can control the portion. This limits the amount of oily, salty, or fattening sauces and dressings you eat. Also ask for fat-free or low-fat dressings.

**The whole grain truth.** Ask for whole grain bread instead of white bread. Many Chinese take-out places offer brown rice instead of white rice. The fiber in whole grains help control your blood sugar and keeps you feeling fuller longer. They are also higher in vitamins and minerals than refined grains.

**Carbohydrate control.** Choose only one starch in your meal. If you have pasta, don't load up on bread. If you have rice, skip the baked potato.

**Protein power.** Choose lean protein sources, like skinless grilled chicken, turkey, fish, tofu, and beans. Lean protein will help you build muscles and stay strong without loading you down with saturated fats. Some fast food places even offer veggie burgers if you are trying to eat less meat.

**A grain of salt.** Takeout food can be very high in sodium, which can raise blood pressure. Taste your food before you reach for the salt shaker. Ask for dressings and sauces on the side and use sparingly. Opt for low sodium soy sauce.

**Get the facts.** Many fast food chains offer printed nutrition information for their menus. Make sure you look at calories, fat, saturated fat, and sodium. This will help you compare menu items so that you can choose healthy meals. If you need help, ask your nutritionist!

#### Sources

1. Dilberti N, Bordini PL, Conklin MT, Roe LS, and Rolls BJ. (2004). Increased portion size leads to increased energy intake in a restaurant meal. *Obesity Research*, 12(3), 562-8.
2. Hurley J, and Liebman B. (2007). Restaurant confidential: Chinese restaurant food. *Nutrition Action HealthLetter*, April, 13-15.
3. Kant AK, and Graubard BI. (2004). Eating out in America, 1987-2000: trends in nutritional correlates. *Preventive Medicine*, 38, 243-9.
4. Rolls BJ, Morris EL, and Roe LS. (2002). Portion size of food affects energy intake in normal-weight and overweight men and women. *Am J Clin Nutr*, 76, 1207-13.