



# Nutrition in the Fast Lane

*Fast food restaurants do not have to remain taboo for the health-conscious consumer. Although some typical foods are high in fat and sodium, it is possible to eat nutritious “fast food” meals if you choose wisely.*

## How Nutritious Is Fast Food?

Typical meals at fast food restaurants supply adequate amounts of protein, iron, and several vitamins such as niacin, thiamin, and vitamin D. However, fast food is relatively high in calories, fat, and saturated fat. The American Heart Association recommends a diet with less than 30% calories from fat, and many fast food items can contain 50% or more of their calories as fat! In addition to fat, fast food items can be extremely high in sodium, cholesterol, and sugar. Traditional fast food meals also lack many essential nutrients such as vitamins A and C, calcium, and fiber.

On the bright side, many fast food restaurants are changing their menus to satisfy the nutrition-conscious consumer. Many establishments now offer grilled chicken, baked potatoes, salad bars with reduced-calorie dressings,

low-fat milk, and whole wheat breads. You can also request sandwiches without special sauce or mayonnaise and unsalted foods. Many restaurants will honor special requests, so all you have to do is ask.

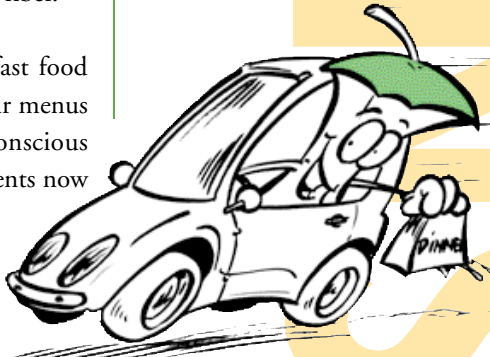
Also, many fast food restaurants now provide nutritional data for their menu items. Review this information prior to selecting your meal.

## Tips for a Nutritious Fast Food Meal

Here are a few suggestions to help you control the fat, calories, and sodium in your fast food meals.

- Choose a fast food restaurant that offers a salad bar. Try reduced-calorie dressings or lemon juice. Limit bacon bits, cheese, crotons, and creamy potato and macaroni salads.

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- Drink a small orange juice, unsweetened tea, or fat-free/1% fat milk rather than soda or milkshakes.
- When ordering pizza, request low-calorie, low-fat toppings such as mushrooms, green peppers, onions, and pineapple. Ask for light cheese.
- Try a plain baked potato instead of french fries. Steamed vegetables are a great topping, but limit cheese, bacon, butter, and sour cream.
- Choose charbroiled or grilled instead of breaded and fried chicken and fish sandwiches.
- Limit high-fat toppings such as special sauce, mayonnaise, and cheese. Use catsup or mustard instead.
- Instead of a double cheeseburger (58% fat), try a plain hamburger (35-40% fat).
- Ask for extra lettuce and tomato for your sandwiches and burgers.
- Avoid super-sized items.

## Alternatives to Standard Fast Food Fare

With the options available at many restaurants, you do not need to settle for the standard “hamburger, fries, and soda” fast food meal. Consider the following possibilities:

- Try a delicatessen for a nutritious sandwich like turkey on whole wheat bread with lettuce, tomato, and mustard.
- Try ethnic foods such as Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Mexican. Many options are low in fat and high in complex carbohydrates, such as a bean and rice burrito with tomato salsa or a vegetable and tofu or chicken stir-fry with light oil.
- Look for soup and salad restaurants for a tasty and nutritious meal.

Remember, these types of restaurants can also offer high-fat, high-sodium items. Select your meal wisely.

For more detailed guidelines on fast food eating, please visit [www.snac.ucla.edu](http://www.snac.ucla.edu).



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## CHOOSING FAST FOOD WISELY

Fast food restaurants have a reputation for serving greasy, high-calorie foods, but this is not always the case. Although most fast foods are high in calories, fat, cholesterol, and sodium, it is possible to eat a nutritious “fast food” meal if you choose wisely. Below are some suggestions to help you make the right choices.

### Main Courses

- Choose whole grain breads if available.
- Beware of high-calorie, high-fat bread products, such as biscuits and croissants.
- Choose chicken breast instead of ground beef sandwiches.
- Choose charbroiled or grilled items instead of fried.
- Avoid breaded and fried chicken nuggets and fish sandwiches.
- Choose baked potatoes instead of french fries. Try the baked potato plain or with salsa, a steamed vegetable topping, or scallions.
- Limit sandwich toppings such as cheese, bacon, chili, mayonnaise, and special sauce. Use mustard and catsup instead, and ask for extra lettuce and tomato.

### Salads

- Select a restaurant that offers a salad bar. Stick to fresh vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, celery, zucchini, tomatoes, spinach, cucumbers, onions, mushrooms, beets, and carrots.
- Add garbanzo, kidney, and white beans for excellent sources of fiber and protein.
- Use low-calorie dressings, seasoned vinegars, salsa, or lemon juice.
- Limit croutons, bacon bits, and cheese.
- Limit creamy potato and macaroni salads.

### Beverages

- Choose 1% low-fat or fat-free milk instead of milkshakes and soda.
- Drink orange juice instead of soda. One small glass will provide 100% of the RDA for vitamin C.
- Water is an excellent beverage. It is inexpensive, contains no calories, and is a great thirst quencher.

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## Compare Your Options

You have choices when you eat in fast food restaurants. Compare the six meals below and decide which ones offer the best buy for your nutrition dollar.

	<b>Calories</b>	<b>Fat (g.)</b>	<b>Sodium (mg.)</b>	<b>Protein (g.)</b>
<b>Meal 1</b>				
Cheeseburger (1/4 lb.)	520	29	1150	28
French Fries (large order)	400	22	200	6
Chocolate Shake, Low-fat (1 serving)	320	2	240	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>1240</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Meal 2</b>				
Grilled Chicken Sandwich (w/o mayo)	300	5	930	27
French Fries (small order)	220	12	110	3
1% Low-fat Milk (8 oz.)	100	3	115	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1155</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Meal 3</b>				
Tuna Sub (w/mayo), 6-inch	519	32	824	15
Potato Chips (1-oz. bag)	160	11	186	2
Soda, Sprite (16 oz.)	192	0	46	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>1056</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Meal 4</b>				
Turkey Sub(w/o mayo), 6-inch	273	4	1303	16
Pretzels (1-oz. bag)	108	1	486	3
Orange Juice (8 oz.)	110	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1789</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Meal 5</b>				
Pepperoni Pizza (extra-thick crust), 2 slices	624	30	1744	32
Ranch Dipping Sauce (4 Tbsp.)	340	36	540	0
Soda, Coke (16 oz.)	195	0	19	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1159</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>2303</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Meal 6</b>				
Vegetarian Pizza (thin crust), 2 slices	362	12	1154	18
Garden Salad with light dressing ( Tbsp.)	85	2	240	2
Water (16 oz.)	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1394</b>	<b>20</b>