

Healthy fast food dining

The summer is coming ... and so is the temptation of eating more fast food, especially when you're out with the kids. This week I want to share with you an article written by J.J. Virgin, CNS, CHFI, and Danielle Jacques, RD, that gives some great tips about how to eat healthier in the fast food jungle we face every day. As I tell my kids — there is “food,” and then there are “treats” that should only be eaten occasionally. Let's be sure that they (and we!) know the difference!

In this “grab-n-go” lifestyle that many of us find ourselves in, we have come to rely on the convenience of the drive-through, but often at the expense of our health. Fast food and casual family dining restaurants can be found on nearly every corner, in every mall, at airports and even in bookstores. Fortunately, with the explosion of fast food restaurants, many of the national chains are now responding to the consumers demand for more healthful options on their menus. Remember, the same principles for healthy eating apply no matter who cooks the meal. Cutting down on saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, and refined carbohydrates supports a healthy body and helps you achieve your personal goals.

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By Dr. James Proodian

So when dining at a fast food restaurant here are a few things to avoid:

1. The “meal and value deals” — this generally means you are going to get fries or chips and a soda with your sandwich, so take a pass and supplement with a piece of fruit from home. Many restaurants are now offering soups and side salads that are a better partner to your main course.

2. “Super-Sizing” — sure you are saving money, but you are sacrificing your fat cells! Practice portion control. Research shows that if you order more, you eat more — so control your fork by controlling your order.

3. The sauces — especially if they are “secret” or “special!” These can add 100 calories or more of unhealthy fat and sugar to your meal.

4. Anything fried or breaded — go for broiled or baked instead.

5. Watch those beverages — they hide unwanted calories and sugar. To put it into perspective a

12-ounce can of cola has 12 teaspoons of sugar (and who still gets only the 12 oz drink?) Grab the bottled water instead.

6. Avoid the frozen or iced coffee/chocolate concoctions — they pack a wallop of calories and fat. You could easily sip down 430 to 650 calories (not including the whipped topping!)

In researching and visiting some of the top fast food and family dining food chains, here are some tips I would like to share with you.

As long as you stay away from the chips, cookies and sugar sodas, Subway offers the healthiest fare available in the fast food arena, as evidenced by their spokesman Jared's terrific weight loss while dining daily at Subway. Nearly everything is healthy, and you can ensure this by choosing any of the “7 under 6 grams of fat sandwiches” and eat half of the bread, or better yet, have it on one of their popular new “low carb” wheat & soy wraps. They use low-fat mayonnaise in their tuna salad and their oil is canola-oil based, which is one of the better oils to use, as it is rich in polyunsaturated omega 3 fats. You can add lots of extra veggies to your sandwich; order any sandwich as a salad, and choose from a variety of soups made fresh each day.

McDonald's now offers a variety of fresh chicken salads — be sure to choose the roasted versus the crispy chicken option, skip the croutons or bacon, and top with a low-fat dressing choice. If you are dying for a burger choose the regular hamburger, Big and Tasty, or QuarterPounder, and have it without cheese, mayonnaise, or ketchup, and toss the top bun. Be sure to include the lettuce, tomato, pickles, onion, and some mustard for spice. Use the lettuce as the top bun. An even better option is the grilled chicken sandwich on a wholewheat bun that McDonald's now offers at many of its locations. Have this without the mayonnaise and with little or no barbeque sauce to avoid the added sugar. If you are looking for a low calorie dessert option, their ice cream cone is a deal at 4.5 grams of fat and just 150 calories. It is still loaded with sugar of course, so remember ... it is a TREAT!

Taco Bell recently launched their “Fresco Style” menu. By replacing the high fat sauces and cheese with salsa you can cut total fat grams per entrée down to 10 grams or less. This option is available for 15 of its menu options. The best choices overall are the soft chicken tacos or the chicken taco salad without the shell, both done “Fresco Style”. And don't forget that they want you to “Voice Your Choice” — and are happy to tailor their menu items to your requests.

Casual family dining restaurants like Applebee's, Chili's or TGI Friday's now offer a variety of entrée salads, whole wheat tortillas and non-starchy veggies with your entrées. Oh yes, those glossy photos on the table of decadent desserts...if you just can't resist, split it with 0 other people and follow the “three bite rule.”

And of course, everyone always wants to know if they can still have pizza. The answer is yes! Order the thin crust, go light on the cheese and heavy on the veggies and you can eat two pieces for less calories and fat than one piece of deep dish pepperoni! This is a great way to sneak in some extra vegetables, too. Add ham or chicken to it and order a dinner salad for a balanced meal.

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Dr. James Proodian is an author, educator, and healthcare practitioner specializing in Chiropractic Rehabilitation and other natural healing techniques. He also provides free health lectures and health screenings for companies, clubs, schools, churches, and other organizations throughout Monmouth County. All of Dr. Proodian's health articles can be found on his website at www.NaturalHealthcareCenter.com. He can also be reached at his practice, Natural Healthcare Center, at 732-222-2219.