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Fast Food Possibilities

Fast food is quick, convenient, satisfying, and inexpensive. It's no wonder that we eat so many fast food meals. Unfortunately, typical fast food meals are high in calories, sodium, fat and cholesterol. They are also lacking in fresh fruits and vegetables. Over time, this can lead to weight gain and increased risk to diabetes and heart disease.

The good news is that many of the fast food chains provide healthier options. Some of these are listed on the menu; some, you just have to ask for. It's not hard to make healthy choices – it's just a matter of trying something new.

When eating fast food:

- Select regular or junior size meals. These are appropriate for most people. A typical regular size meal (hamburger, French fries and soda) is ~680 calories. A large order of this same meal is ~1,330 calories. Eating the large meal once a week for a year, could mean a weight gain of ~9-10 pounds.
- Select grilled or broiled meats and baked potatoes. On average, a
- grilled chicken sandwich has ~ 10 grams of fat less than a breaded/fried sandwich. And even with a serving of sour cream, a baked potato has 5 grams of fat less than a small serving of French fries. Over the year, this could mean another 2 pounds of body weight.
- Pass up the fatty condiments. An easy way to make your fast food meal healthier is to order sandwiches without mayonnaise, cheese, bacon, or sauces. Ketchup, mustard, pickles, or additional fresh vegetables can be used to add flavor without adding fat. Order salads with low-fat salad dressing. The calories and fat you pass up could be more than is found in a frozen yogurt or soft ice cream dessert.
- Select orange juice, low fat milk/chocolate milk, or water. A regular size fast food soda provides a similar number of calories – but no nutrients other than sugar! Even a kid size milk shake – though a little higher in calories – is a more nutritious choice.
- Be untraditional. You don't have to order traditional fast food menu items or go to traditional fast food

restaurants to get the convenience of a fast food meal. Many restaurants now offer subs, wraps, burritos, kebabs, chili or hearty salads. These can be made with lean meats, fresh vegetables, and low fat spreads. Several restaurants now offer fruit cups or side salad meal options. And some grocery stores and smaller shops offer complete prepared and made-to-order meals.

- Don't feel that you have to give up your favorite foods. If you really like French fries, eat them – but eat less. Order fries for yourself and a salad

(with low-fat dressing) for a friend or family member. Then, share with each other. If you prefer whole wheat bread or extra vegetables in a sandwich, ask if it can be made up – even if you don't see it on the menu.

No one wants to give up the ease of a fast food meal. So next time you eat fast food, think about making healthier choices. If you eat at fast food restaurants frequently, than consuming smaller portions of carefully selected menu items can make a big difference in your long-term health.

For additional information, contact your local County Extension Office:



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