

Eat Out Without Ruining Your Diet

By *Theresa De Lay*

Many dieters recommend staying far away from restaurants when you're trying to lose weight. Maybe I'm just stubborn, but I try not to let ANYTHING in life hold me back. If my family and friends are getting together for dinner or if I'm craving Olive Garden for lunch, I'm going! Of course, I still have 5 (okay FINE, closer to 10) pounds of baby weight to lose so I've adopted some diet-safe, eating-out habits. Here's a few of my favorites:



- Drink a full glass of water before your meal arrives. Many of us think we are famished when, in fact, we are merely dehydrated.
- Instead of a fried appetizer, get soup or salad.
- Eat a small, high-fiber snack before arriving. A hungry diner is a foolish diner!
- You don't have to forgo the bread basket completely. Limit yourself to one piece and leave off the butter.
- Be wary of all crispy, fried or creamy accompaniments to your meal! Ask to have them left off. If you trust your own will power, simply place them on the side of your plate.
- If possible, ask for all salad dressing and sauces on the side. The ever-fabulous Tyra Banks dips just the tip of her fork in dressing before grabbing each bite of salad. By doing this, she shaves off an incredible number of calories but still gets the tasty goodness of salad dressing in each bite.
- If it suits your taste, opt for a vinaigrette type salad dressing. Even better, I simply sprinkle olive oil and balsamic vinegar on most salads with a dash of black pepper. I find (in the grocery store at least) that many of the "Olive Oil Vinaigrette" dressings are simply FLAVORED with olive oil and vinegar, the actual ingredients are often quite different and don't necessarily have the same health benefits.
- Chicken and fish are good entrée choices but be wary of ANY meat slathered in sauces. That lean chicken breast may sound healthy, but depending on the calorie-laden sauce used to flavor it, you may be better off choosing a different menu item.
- The most ridiculous advice I can give is to avoid pasta. Although steering clear would certainly help keep the calories off my plate, I can never bring myself to do so (it must be the Italian in me). One thing you can do is opt for tomato or pesto based sauces instead of cream or cheese based ones.

- Stay away from sugary beverages. This includes lemonade, soda, smoothies and most alcoholic beverages. For a lower calorie option, ask for lemon slices with your water or order diet alternatives to your favorite drinks. I happen to like iced tea with Splenda or a little bit of honey.
- Remember that alcohol fuels appetite. If you choose to have a drink, do so after you've eaten your meal.
- Find out if substitutions are permitted. You can usually swap out French fries for veggies or a baked potato.
- Ask for nutritional information. Many restaurants have nutritional guides to help ease your ordering anxiety. If they don't, I've found that most waiters are more than happy to answer your questions.
- This may seem strange, but ask to have your to-go box brought WITH your meal (or before). Put away a portion of your food before digging in and save it for leftovers. You won't be so tempted to eat it if it's not on your plate; out of sight, out of mind.
- Food is only part of the reason for eating at a restaurant. Eat slowly and enjoy your company.
- For dessert, opt for a cup of coffee (sans the milk and sugar... or at least think small if you do use it) and a bowl of fruit.