

How to Eat Healthy—and Fast

By Tara Mataraza Desmond, for IMPULSE

The tempo of our lives, running from place to place, would seem to send metabolisms soaring and preclude us from having to diet or go to the gym. Instead, we skip exercise and healthy meals and the drive-thru crew becomes more familiar than our own kitchens.

Katie Cavuto, a registered dietician, personal chef and member of this generation of frenetic movers, advises an approach to healthier eating on the go (though, she prefaces her guidance with "don't eat fast food").

Fatten your head to loosen your belt. That is: research and learn. Fast food restaurants are required to make available nutrition and ingredient details for menu items. If you haven't lost your appetite after familiarizing yourself with the facts, then choose wisely. Americans have a real problem recognizing how much food is sufficient, Cavuto said. Fast food restaurants perpetuate the problem, offering more for less.

Your best option: Opt for a kids' meal or individual items off the dollar menu helps keep portion size in check.

Count all of your calories. "People don't think that beverages count," Cavuto notes. Yet, drinks can be pools of nutritional waste, with tons of calories, sugar and sometimes fat. Pick water above all else, or order diet beverages or unsweetened teas.

Look to the "healthy" options. Cavuto emphasizes that while fast food restaurants advertise their ability to be "part of a healthy, balanced diet," and highlight lower calorie and low-fat items, you need to keep in mind that you should be eating for nutritive health, too. Additives and preservatives are unhealthy ingredients commonly found in fast food.

That said, healthier options, such as Taco Bell's Fresco Menu (items under 10 grams of fat) or Chick-fil-A's side dish alternatives (carrot and raisin salad, cup of chicken soup, side salad), are better than french fries.

But, avoid some "healthy" options. Salads tossed with bacon, cheese and with the entire packet of fatty dressings dumped on them are still no good. Think before you dump that entire packet of ranch dressing on your salad.

Think outside the bun, taco shell and bucket. Packing your lunch is best because it gives you the most control over what you eat. The next best thing are stores like Wegmans and Whole Foods that offer sushi, freshly made soups, salad bars and sandwiches made with roasted, all-natural meats. Wawa offers prepackaged fruits and vegetables to grab and eat on the go. While these places might not have drive-thru windows, allotting an extra five minutes to go inside can easily spare you 500 calories. Besides, if you won't have time to make it to the gym tonight, couldn't you use the walk across the parking lot anyway?