



THE

3-STEP PROCESS

FOR DINING OUT SUCCESSFULLY



Staying in the direction of your values can be challenging if you dine out regularly. Menu items are often high in calories and served in large portions, and there are many factors in those settings that can influence what or how much you eat or drink. The following 3-step process of planning ahead, executing your plan and reflecting on your experience will help you manage these challenges so you can end the day on track with your days goals.

The Reality of Dining Out

One of the restaurant industry's primary goals is to earn your food dollar. It does so by producing incredibly tasty foods with liberal use of fats, sugar and salt, and by providing a sense of value for your dollar by serving large portions. They also create an environment that influences your decisions. Everything from the décor, the type of music playing, the lighting and description and visual images of menu items are carefully designed to create a pleasurable experience conducive to eating, drinking, spending and having a good time.

Some individuals who have succumbed to these influences time and time again may become accustomed to overeating in these settings. Over time, this creates a conditioning that drives overeating when dining out. We call someone with this conditioning the "Restauranteur," which may manifest itself in specific settings or times, such as business lunches or dinners, social outings or weekend dining.

If dining out often leads to overeating for you, rest assured that you can learn to eat more moderately in these settings by following our 3-step process for dining out successfully.

THE 3-STEP PROCESS

1



PLANNING AHEAD

2



EXECUTING YOUR PLAN

3



REFLECTING ON YOUR
EXPERIENCE



STEP 1 - Plan Ahead

'[Planned eating](#)' is one of the most effective strategies for eating in a way that is consistent with your goals. You are making decisions at a time when you are less likely to be influenced by triggers and cues associated with a [dining out](#) experience. You become aware of exactly what you need to do to have an on-track day, leaving much less to chance. Carefully consider the following questions as you devise your plan.



What kind of day do I want to have?

Not every day needs to be a weight loss day. It can be part of your plan to allow for extra calories for a specific meal, such as when celebrating a special occasion. Consider planning a maintenance day (calories equivalent to your Total Energy Expenditure), which will allow some flexibility in your food choices, portions and the number of alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks you have. This does not mean a free-for-all dining experience; maintenance days still require thoughtful planning.



My maintenance target is = _____

Some people like to 'save' calories through the day for a planned indulgent dinner out. The danger of eating too little through the day is that you will arrive at dinner feeling ravenous. What are the chances that you will eat moderately when feeling ravenous? Regular meals and a good quality afternoon snack are recommended before dining out for dinner, especially when dining late into the evening.



Where am I eating?

Choose a restaurant that has healthy options. Be the one to suggest where to go, rather than relying on someone else to make the decision.



Is nutrition information available?

Many franchised and fast food restaurants post nutrition information on their websites. If nutrition information is not available, quite often the menu is posted so that you can review your options ahead of time. Consider using My Fitness Pal to pre-track or research the calorie content in foods you wish to have or dishes you are not familiar with to learn more about the calorie content.



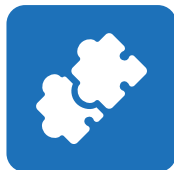
Will I eat bread, appetizer, entrée, dessert?

Depending on your calorie target, it may be challenging to have multiple courses and successfully execute a weight loss or maintenance day. You will have to decide what is worth the calories and pre-track your planned meal to see if it fits your calorie allotment.



Will I drink alcohol? How many drinks?

Set alcohol rules and stick to them. Recognize that too much alcohol can weaken your resolve to eat in moderation. For tips on how to drink less, refer to the *Alcohol: What's Your Plan?* resource.



STEP 2 - Execute Your Plan

Now that you have a plan in place, your next step is to execute it and stick to your plan, no matter what.



Enjoy your meal with a quiet mind.

Once in the restaurant, you may become aware of the start of an inner dialogue or debate: **“Maybe I’ll have the fries instead of the salad. I’ll only eat half,”** or **“Everyone else is having dessert, maybe I should too.”** Recognize these as permission thoughts that rationalize why—in the moment—you should ignore your plan. If you are aware of these thoughts, stand up to them and stop them in their tracks. If the idea of missing out is a ‘downer,’ remember that you can always plan for that special treat next time, and keep in mind that sticking to your plan will result in its own sense of gratification in the aftermath.

For a detailed explanation of how to address permission thoughts, refer to the *Permission Thoughts and Counter Dialogue* resource.



Be assertive. Ask for what you need/want.

If you're a little shy and tend to not 'make a fuss,' practice asking questions about the menu items or requesting modifications. Requests such as dressing or sauce on the side, or double vegetables instead of starch, are often accommodated. Consider talking to your server away from your dining companions if that makes you feel more comfortable.



Deal effectively with food/drink pushers.

Some of your dining companions may unknowingly put some pressure on you to eat or drink in a way that is not a part of your plan. Assert yourself! Be polite, yet firm. Try "No, thank you" (repeatedly if necessary). If the pressure is relentless, come up with reasons that you are comfortable with, such as:

I've had enough and I'm full. If I eat too much, I won't feel good.

I had a big lunch, so I'm not that hungry.

I've been reducing my intake of X (sugar, fat, salt, alcohol, gluten...) and I feel so much better doing so.

I have a number of dinners out this week so I need to pace myself.





STEP 3 – Reflect on your Experience

After the dining experience, ask yourself: “Am I where I want to be?”

If the answer is **YES**, meaning you’ve had an on-track day, **take note of how you feel about that experience**. If your actions of the day have taken you one step closer to your long-term goals, what does that experience feel like? A positive emotional response (or lack of a negative response) will help reinforce those behaviors that you need to focus on to meet your goals. Make note of this experience in a journal or in the MFP food notes so that you can refer to it later on when you need a boost of motivation.

If you answer **NO**, meaning you’ve had an off-track day, **take note of how you feel about that experience**. If your actions of the day were not consistent with your goals, what does that experience feel like? A negative emotional response will help deter you from engaging in those behaviors that lead to an off-track day.

An off-track day is also an opportunity to learn more about yourself – about cues and triggers that affect your eating and drinking. What permission thoughts encouraged you to give in? What in your environment—the people you were with, the time of day, your mood, etc.—influenced your decisions?

For a detailed explanation of the reflection exercise, refer to the *End of Day Reflection* resource.



Beware of Self-Critical Thoughts

Reflecting on your day, especially an off-track day, can carry risk. You may experience self-critical thoughts, also known as ‘beating yourself up,’ which in themselves can be barriers to success. For now, be aware of these self-critical thoughts and make note of them. In future sessions, you will learn how to challenge them and replace them with more resilient thoughts so that they will no longer hold you back from moving forward in your efforts to manage your weight.

For a detailed explanation of addressing self-critical thoughts, refer to the *Cognitive Restructuring* resource.





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