

# Tips for Dining Out

Restaurant dining can be a challenge when limiting calories for weight loss. Many restaurant dishes are higher in calories as a result of larger portions and more liberal use of high calorie ingredients. Extras beyond the entrée – the bread basket, appetizer, dessert, alcoholic drinks – can all add up to more than your total daily calorie budget! The following practical tips will help you plan ahead and execute your plan when dining out so that you can stay true to your goals.

## Plan, Execute and Reflect

Remember the 3-step process for dining out successfully:

### 1 PLAN AHEAD

...for the kind of day you want to have, your calorie budget and what and how much you will eat.

### 2 EXECUTE YOUR PLAN

...no matter what.

### 3 REFLECT ON THE DAY

...by asking yourself if you are on track and noticing how that feels.



## Beware of restaurant meal calories

As you become more familiar with the caloric content of different foods and become more skilled at estimating portion sizes, you will likely be surprised by the calorie content of some of your favorite restaurant appetizers, meals and desserts. In fact, some of the calorie counts posted on restaurant websites, menus and menu boards will be much higher than you would have expected. By being aware of these facts, you will have a better understanding of how challenging it can be to lose weight when dining out regularly, and you will have the information you need to make decisions that will help you reach your goals.

Dining out on occasion is unlikely to have a significant impact on your weight loss progress. But if you dine out regularly, whether by choice or necessity, it will be more challenging to create consistent calorie deficits for a number of reasons:

Restaurant meals often contain more added fat/sugar/salt and calories than meals made at home and are more difficult to quantify accurately.

Restaurant portions are often large and exceed the calorie budget of a single meal.

Dining out often means a 3-4 course meal with bread, appetizer, entrée and dessert, which is rarely how someone eats at home.

Dining out often involves alcohol, or more alcohol than typically consumed at home.

Dining out may involve social pressures to eat/drink in a way that is not consistent with your goals and make it harder to stick to your plan.

A dinner out may be later in the evening than usual meal times, which may influence hunger. Eating moderately when ravenous is difficult to do.

If you are not satisfied with your weight loss progress thus far, ask yourself if too many restaurant meals are contributing and whether it's possible to eat home-cooked meals more often.

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## Calorie counts may be legislated

In Ontario, Canada, legislation has passed requiring large chain restaurants to post the calorie content of their foods and beverages on their menus or menu boards since January 2017. Many large chain restaurants have this information available on the internet or by request. In many cases, the information has also been uploaded to My Fitness Pal by users of the tool.

Although posted calories are very helpful, be aware that they may not be 100% accurate. Changes to recipes and ingredients, as well as variability in portions served can influence the calorie count.

The following examples show how reviewing the menu and nutrition information ahead of time can help you plan a more moderate calorie containing meal.

## Choose carefully from the menu

When possible, be selective when choosing a restaurant. Ensure healthy options are available. Consider the following when reviewing the menu:

**Cooking methods:** A lower calorie food can become a high calorie food simply by the way it's prepared. Foods that are steamed, baked, broiled, grilled, braised, poached, stir-fried or roasted are generally prepared with less added fats and are lower in calories. Foods that are fried, deep-fried, breaded, au gratin, and prepared with cheese, cream sauces or gravies will be higher in calories.

**Simple vs complex dishes:** Choosing menu items that are composed of few ingredients (e.g. fish, rice, vegetables) will likely be easier to quantify than complex dishes with multiple ingredients.

**Appetizers:** If having an appetizer, lower calorie options include seafood such as grilled octopus and calamari, shrimp cocktail or tuna tartar, basic salads with dressing on the side or broth-based vegetable soups.

## Lower and Higher Calorie Meals at The Keg and Earls:

	LOWER CALORIE MEAL	HIGHER CALORIE MEAL
The Keg	<p><b>STARTER</b> – shrimp cocktail (128)  <b>ENTRÉE</b> – 6-oz top sirloin (292), roasted garlic mashed potatoes (230), mixed vegetables (86)  <b>DRINK</b> – water, 6 oz glass wine (150)                      Espresso or coffee (0)                      No bread, no pre-dinner cocktail, no dessert</p> <p><b>Total = 886 Kcal</b></p>	<p><b>STARTER</b> – baked garlic shrimp (507)  <b>ENTRÉE</b> – 12-oz NY steak (734), loaded baked potato (556), mixed vegetables (86)  <b>DRINK</b> – water, 9 oz glass wine (200)                      Espresso or coffee (0)                      No bread, no pre-dinner cocktail, no dessert</p> <p><b>Total = 2083 Kcal</b></p>
Earls	<p><b>STARTER</b> – cream of tomato soup (160)  <b>ENTRÉE</b> – Lois Lake Steelhead salmon (390), cauliflower and Brussels sprouts (120)  <b>DRINK</b> – water, 6 oz glass wine (150)                      Espresso or coffee (0)                      No bread, no pre-dinner cocktail, no dessert</p> <p><b>Total = 820 Kcal</b></p>	<p><b>STARTER</b> – dynamite roll (470)  <b>ENTRÉE</b> – Coriander crusted albacore tuna (710), warm potato salad (670)  <b>DRINK</b> – water, 9 oz glass wine (200)                      Espresso or coffee (0)                      No bread, no pre-dinner cocktail, no dessert</p> <p><b>Total = 2050 Kcal</b></p>

Nutrition information sources accessed May 16, 2016:

<https://www.kegsteakhouse.com/assets/Uploads/Keg-Nutritional-Info-ENG-DEC2015.pdf>, <https://earls.ca/files/Earls-Nutrition-info.pdf>

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**Entrées:** Lower calorie options include fish, seafood, lean cuts of meat and poultry such as filet mignon, pork tenderloin and chicken breast. Vegetable side-dishes are lower in calories than starch-based sides.

**Desserts:** If having dessert, fruit and sorbet are lower calorie options. Consider a regular or decaf coffee or low fat cappuccino to finish off the meal instead of dessert to save on calories.

**Alcoholic beverages:** If consuming alcohol, a standard drink (12 oz beer, 5 oz wine, 1 ½ oz spirits) is about 110-150 Kcal. A light beer is about 100 Kcal. Cocktails and drinks with sweet mixes are higher in calories. Club soda and diet soda are calorie-free.

## Consider what's worth the calories

As part of your planning, decide on your calorie budget and how to spend it. You will likely need to choose between the bread basket, appetizer, entrée, dessert and alcoholic beverage. What's worth it for you and what are the trade-offs? If you love the bread, can you have an entrée without starch? If dessert is a must, can you forgo an appetizer? If you enjoy a glass of wine, can you skip the bread and butter? It's up to you to balance your choices.

## Ask questions, know your options

Your server is a valuable resource and should be very familiar with the dishes on the menu. Ask questions to learn more about the menu and your options. Most restaurants will accommodate reasonable requests.

- Ask your server about the ingredients in your meal or how it's prepared, or for suggestions of a lower calorie/lighter option.
- Consider requesting no bread basket to avoid temptation.
- Ask for salad dressings/sauces to be served on the side so that you can control the amount.
- Consider asking for a double serving of veggies instead of rice/potato/pasta to save calories.
- Be selective with the types of high calorie ingredients in salads and sandwiches. Cheese, bacon, avocado, nuts/seeds, creamy dressings and spreads pack a lot of calories in a small portion.

## Watch portions

Restaurant portions are created as 'one-size fits all' when in fact they exceed the calorie budget of a single meal for most diners. If you anticipate portions to be generous, consider the following strategies.

- Order a half-portion, lunch portion or senior portion, if available, or ask to be served less.
- Choose 2 lighter appetizers instead of an entrée.
- Share an appetizer, entrée or dessert with your dining companion(s).



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- Take leftovers home. Ask your server to pack up half your meal before bringing it to the table to avoid temptation.
- Leave food on your plate. To discourage nibbling, put a napkin over the remaining food and push your plate to the side, or douse the food with salt or pepper to make it unappealing. Enjoy a mint when you've finished eating to help discourage nibbling.



## Have a plan for drinks

Plan to have calorie-free beverages available to sip on such as water, sparkling water, diet pop, coffee or tea. If drinking alcohol, consider the following strategies.

- Set a limit on the number of drinks and stick to it.
- Choose wine, light beer or hard liquor with unsweetened mix rather than sugary drinks.
- Delay your first drink; having it with your meal rather than before the meal. Alcohol stimulates appetite and can weaken resolve to eat and drink moderately.
- Alternate between an alcoholic and non-alcohol beverage if having more than one.
- If sharing a bottle of wine, pour your own wine (rather than letting the server top up your glass) so that you know how much you've consumed.

## Account for hidden calories

You can assume that calories are hiding in the form of added fats and sugars in restaurant meals. Vegetables are often sautéed in butter or oil. Fish and meats may be marinated or brushed with oil. Butter and cream may be added to mashed potatoes and butter or oil added to cooked grains. Sauces and gravies can also be high in fat and sugar. Ensure that you account for extra calories in your food diary by using "Quick Add Calories" in My Fitness Pal and add 150-250 Kcal to the meal.

If you have difficulty remembering the details of your restaurant meal, consider taking a photo of your plate to help you track and quantify your meal later on.

