

MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER?

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A diabetes meal plan is made up of healthy foods in portion sizes that are measured to meet your special needs. Unlike a quick weight loss diet that may last only a few weeks or months, most people with diabetes hope to eat healthy for the rest of their lives. To do that, many stop going out to eat. They fear they will be tempted by the items on the menu or at the buffets and make the wrong food choices. While eating out can present certain challenges, here are some tips for staying true to your plan while eating out.

1 CHOOSE WHERE TO EAT

Help decide where to eat when you go out with your spouse or friends. Your dining partners may not think about your diabetes when they pick a restaurant. Suggest a place that offers all types of foods so you can select foods that fit in your meal plan. A fried fish place offering little else is not as good a choice as a restaurant that has a nice salad bar, soups and many entrée options.

2 CHECK THE MENU AHEAD OF TIME

Try to get a copy of the restaurant's menu before you go so you can plan your order before you leave home. That gives you a chance to consider what is best for you to eat without any pressure. You won't be swayed by what other diners eat and you'll be less tempted by foods that may be displayed or featured as specials. To get a copy of the menu, call and ask the eatery to fax or email you a copy or visit the restaurant's website where the menu may be posted.

3 HAVE IT YOUR WAY

Don't be shy about asking to have your meal prepared in a way that suits you best. These days, many people make requests when they go out to eat, even if they don't have diabetes. Your request won't be the first or the last that your server receives, so don't be afraid to call him or her over to discuss your options. Ask for an extra portion of steamed veggies in place of French fries. Or ask if an item can be broiled or baked instead of fried. Feel free to ask the server to put your salad dressing on the side rather than on the salad so you can better control the amount you use. Don't worry: It really is OK to ask.

4 BE THE FIRST TO ORDER

When you and your dining partners arrive, be the first to place your order with the waiter. If you do that first, you will be less likely to change your mind when you hear what your fellow diners plan to eat. Select what is right for you to order and let the others do the same.

5 FILL UP WITH WATER AND SOUP

Many people enjoy a tall glass of water before they begin to eat their meal. A bowl of broth-based soup is also a great way to start your meal. Drinking liquids, especially warm liquids, can help you feel less hungry so you may end up eating less.

6 CUT BACK ON PORTIONS

Americans love super-sized food portions. Restaurant owners know that and are happy to provide diners with large food amounts that are usually high in fat and calories. When your meal arrives, eat the amount that is right for you and have the server wrap up the leftover food to take home. Or order a single entrée and share it with a friend.

7 LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL

If your doctor agrees that it is OK for you to drink, you can enjoy some alcohol with your meal. Just be sure to have something to eat with your drink to help keep your blood glucose level from dropping too low. And remember that alcohol is a source of calories.

Don't let your diabetes keep you from enjoying the company of good friends at mealtime. Take care of your diabetes needs, make healthy menu choices and have fun.

The American Diabetes Association recommends that men limit their alcohol intake to no more than two drinks per day and women limit their drinking to one or fewer drinks each day. One alcoholic drink is a 12-ounce beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1½ ounces of vodka, whisky, gin or other distilled spirit.