

Eating Out Wisely

The following is general information and does not take the place of medical advice from a doctor, nurse, registered dietitian/nutritionist (RD/RDN), or behavioral medicine specialist.

General Rule of Thumb When Eating Out

Dining out may present some difficulties when trying to achieve good blood sugar (glucose) control. Restaurant foods may be more processed, overcooked, and contain extra sugars. The portion sizes served at restaurants tend to be larger than normally needed.

Here are tips to help keep your blood sugar low when dining out:

1. If you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) or gestational diabetes in pregnancy, your medical doctor, nurse, registered dietitian, or behavioral medicine specialist will provide you information on meal planning. Know your meal plan and carry a copy with you.
2. Learn the foods and portions on each exchange list. Count carbohydrates when possible.
3. Become familiar with serving sizes by practicing at home. Measuring will teach you to recognize portions. It is okay to leave food uneaten if the serving size is too large.
4. Avoid juices and all sweetened beverages, coffees, and teas.
5. Don't hesitate to ask questions about how a food is prepared or for a substitution, even when the menu states "no substitutions".
6. Carry a few foods with you to supplement a meal if necessary.
7. Eat slowly.



American Food Restaurants

While there are many options to choose from, try to order a plain dish such as meat, fish, steamed vegetables, or plain potato. Choose broiled meat, fish, and poultry. Avoid cream sauces, gravy, and casserole dishes. Choose broth-type soups.

Sandwiches often have excessive bread portions. French rolls and baguettes have refined sugar and are usually served in large portions. Select whole grain breads in average size servings.

Be aware of sodas. "Natural" does not mean that a product is sugar-free. Sodas with added juices should be avoided. Mineral water with essence of flavor is okay to use.

Chinese Food Restaurants

You can maintain normal blood sugar levels with Chinese food. Keep in mind Chinese food can have hidden starches and sugar in sweet-and-sour sauces, cornstarch in meat and vegetable dishes, and soups. The obvious starches, such as steamed rice and noodles, need to be measured. Chinese pancakes and steamed wonton noodles must be included in your starch allowance. Fried rice, fried noodles and deep-fried batter coated foods are the starches to avoid. Brown rice should be substituted for white sticky rice.

Pork buns and barbecued pork ribs should also be avoided. Select steamed fish or stir-fried vegetable dishes. Leave any unknown sauces on your plate. Avoid sweet-and-sour dishes and fried foods such as egg rolls, fried prawns, or fried wontons. Have a fresh orange for dessert if you are allowed a fruit exchange with your meal. One fortune cookie can substitute for half of a starch exchange. Use plain tea in moderation. Ask for extra hot water to dilute if the tea is too strong. Sauces and additives to avoid include oyster sauce, plum sauce, sweet-and-sour sauce, and cornstarch.

Fast Food Restaurants

When dining at fast food restaurants, eat plain small hamburgers. “Protein style” burgers are also a good option. You may add mayonnaise and mustard but avoid ketchup, relish, and other sweet sauces. Limit French fries and avoid breaded and deep-fried foods such as fried chicken, fish sticks, or breaded meats. If you eat deep-fried foods, remove the bread or batter coating.

Avoid biscuits and croissants at breakfast. English muffins or whole wheat toast are better choices. Grilled chicken or pita pocket chicken are also good selections.

Japanese Food Restaurants

At Japanese restaurants, healthy vegetable and protein choices are always available, but avoid teriyaki sauces, tempura, and sweetened rice dishes. The vinegar used in making sushi rice is often sweetened, so be careful with portion control. Raw fish, which is in most sushi, should be avoided in pregnancy. California rolls (crab, avocado, cucumber) or vegetarian sushi (cucumber, shredded carrot, avocado, eggplant) are options.

Mexican Food Restaurants

Mexican food has a variety of options to choose from but keep a close eye on starches. For example, many Mexican restaurants will serve chips and salsa. One basket of chips can easily meet and even exceed your starch allowance. Try to enjoy one or two chips with plenty of salsa or ask your server to not bring a basket of chips to the table at all.

When ordering an entrée, select meals which consist of meat, fish or chicken, and cheese rather than mainly beans, rice, and tortillas. Adding non-starchy vegetables like salad, cucumbers, chili tomato salsa or pico de gallo is better to eat than rice and beans.

Avocado, sour cream and olives are fine to include. These foods will not raise your blood sugar level, but they do add a substantial amount of fat calories. Suggested selections in Mexican restaurants are carne asada-char broiled beef or meat and vegetable fajitas. Eat one or two plain corn tortillas for starch. Try to avoid sweet bread, flour tortillas, birote (sourdough bread), refried beans, and tamales.

Indian Food Restaurants

Indian food has many healthy choices but can be high in carbohydrates (naan and certain chutneys). Raita should be considered as a milk group. Be sure to add a non-starchy protein to balance out the carbohydrates. Examples of non-starchy proteins are paneer (Indian cottage cheese), eggs, nuts, seeds, cheese, and tofu. Nut butter is another good example.

Italian Food Restaurants

While always popular, try to avoid red tomato sauces which contain sugar. Ask your server if sugar free sauces are available. Select a light olive oil and garlic sauce or pesto instead. Try to remember the allowed portion for noodles (one cup) to avoid eating too much pasta. Avoid adding French bread when eating pasta dishes. Add salad to complete the meal. Eat a big salad when going out for pizza and only eat one-two small slices or one large slice of pizza at most. Use an oil and vinegar salad dressing for your salad. Avoid creamy salad dressings as they often contain starch as a thickening agent or extra sugar. Drink water and avoid sweetened beverages and alcohol.

Vietnamese/Thai Food Restaurants

Vietnamese/Thai food offers many healthy options, especially if you ensure proper portion control of rice or rice noodles. One small rice bowl or one cup of rice or rice noodles equals the size of the palm of the hand. Rice noodles are preferred since they may not raise your blood sugar as much as white rice. Breaded proteins such as deep-fried wontons, prawns, and hum bao (steam-filled bun) should be avoided as they raise blood sugar.

Non-starchy vegetables such as bittermelon, okra, and bok choy are examples to include in a meal when eating out. Try to avoid condensed/coconut milk or added sugars to meat marinades. Vietnamese sandwiches are often served with a large white bread roll. Try to omit the bread by ordering a plate with meat and vegetables. Eat small whole fruits, such as a tangerine, rather than drinking fruit juices. Limit dishes with peanut sauce. Avoid sweetened teas, coffees, and beverages with tapioca pearls such as Boba. Clear soups such as Tom Yum that contain lean meat, chicken and vegetables are a good choice to make while eating out