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News Release

Dine Smart

Do you find yourself overwhelmed with choices at your favorite restaurants and fast food stops? Finding meals and food combinations that won't break your diet or ruin your caloric intake for the day takes knowledge and practice. However, anyone can learn to select the best choices with a few rules to keep in mind.

First, think ahead and decide upon a particular eating place. If possible, go online and see if the dishes or food items at that particular restaurant have a calorie analysis posted. This way, you can choose which items fit into your diet for the day and you will avoid menu distraction when ordering. It is important not to starve yourself during the day in anticipation of a large dinner meal. Eat mini meals and space healthy snacks throughout the day to keep your energy levels up and avoid cravings and splurges later. Apples, almonds, walnuts, dried apricots, grapes, cheese sticks, or a dab of peanut butter on whole wheat toast are examples of healthy foods that offer a combination of fiber, healthy fat and protein to keep you satiated until your main meal.

If you are unable to decide what you will have beforehand, look for low fat cooking methods such as steamed, broiled, baked, roasted, poached, and lightly sautéed or lightly stir-fried. Beware of high-fat terms such as cream sauce, au gratin, smothered, breaded, Alfredo, battered, "with gravy," cheese sauce, au fromage, escalloped, parmesan, hollandaise, béarnaise, prime, pot pie, or pastry crust. Ask that butter, sauces, and dressings be served on the side so that you can control the amount you eat. Dip your fork into the sauce or dressing before piercing your food so that you still get the savory taste of sauce without saturating all of your food in fat.

At fast food restaurants, go for regular sized burgers and sandwiches. Grilled chicken and roast beef sandwiches minus mayonnaise and cheese make good choices. Horseradish sauce, hot sauce, salsa, mustard, and cocktail sauce are relatively low in calories and can add needed flavor as can vinegar, lemon, ginger and herbs and spices. Soup and salad make an excellent low fat meal. Go for low fat broth based soups with lots of vegetables or beans. When ordering a salad the best dressings to consider are vinaigrettes, or low fat dressings. Beware of the Caesar salad, which is often higher in fat than a cheeseburger.

Perhaps the best restaurant advice is just to avoid the extras. Choose a calorie free beverage such as water or unsweet tea. Avoid appetizers or choose a garden salad to hold you over till the food arrives. Skip the butter on the bread and avoid tempting desserts. If you must have something sweet, non-fat frozen yogurt, sorbet, fruit or melon will do the trick. And remember, if you feel

you will be tempted to overeat ask the waiter to put half of your meal in a to-go box before your meal is brought to the table.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email jld0021@aces.edu.

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