

CLIENT RESOURCE



Eating Out & Staying on Track

HOW TO ENJOY YOUR SOCIAL LIFE, EAT AT YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANTS, AND STILL HIT YOUR GOALS - WITHOUT THE GUILT

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Introduction

One of the biggest fears people have when starting a health and fitness journey is thinking that they'll have to give up their social life. No more dinners out with friends. No more family celebrations. No more date nights. Just tupperware and meal prep forever.

That couldn't be further from the truth.

Learning how to navigate eating out is one of the most important skills you can build - because life isn't going to stop happening just because you have goals. Birthdays, work lunches, vacations, date nights - they're all part of a full, rich life. The goal isn't to avoid them. The goal is to enjoy them without completely derailing your progress.

This guide gives you a complete toolkit for eating out confidently, making smart choices without feeling deprived, and getting back on track quickly when things don't go perfectly.

THE MINDSET SHIFT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Before we get into the practical strategies, we need to address the most important piece: your mindset around eating out.

DITCH THE ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

The biggest mistake people make when eating out is thinking in extremes - "I'll be perfect" or "I've already blown it, might as well go all in." Neither serves you. One meal out does not make or break your progress. What matters is the overall pattern of your choices across days, weeks, and months - not any single meal.

ONE MEAL IS JUST ONE MEAL

If you eat three meals a day, that's roughly 21 meals per week. One restaurant meal is less than 5% of your weekly intake. Even if it's not perfect, it simply doesn't have the power to undo your progress - unless you use it as an excuse to spiral for the rest of the week.

THE MINDSET SHIFT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Your goal is not to be a perfect eater. Your goal is to build a healthy relationship with food that you can maintain for life. That includes restaurant meals, celebrations, and the occasional dessert. Enjoying food is not a failure. Guilt and shame around food are far more damaging than any single meal ever could be.

BEFORE YOU GO — THE PREP STRATEGIES

The easiest way to stay on track when eating out is to prepare before you even get to the restaurant.

1.

LOOK UP THE MENU IN ADVANCE

Most restaurants post their menus and nutritional information online. Spend two minutes looking at the menu before you go so you're not making a decision under pressure while everyone else is ordering.

Identify two or three options that align with your goals so you arrive with a plan, not a dilemma.

2.

EAT A PROTEIN-RICH SNACK BEFOREHAND

Never arrive at a restaurant starving. When you're ravenous, your willpower is at its lowest and everything on the menu looks good - especially the bread basket and appetizers. Have a small, protein-rich snack 1–2 hours before your reservation: Greek yogurt, a protein bar, cheese stick, a protein shake, or some cottage cheese for example. You'll arrive satisfied enough to make a calm, intentional choice rather than an impulsive one.

3.

HYDRATE BEFORE YOU GO

Drink a full glass of water before leaving the house. Being well-hydrated before a meal helps you feel fuller faster and prevents thirst from being mistaken as hunger.

4. **DECIDE YOUR APPROACH IN ADVANCE**

Before you go, decide what kind of meal this is going to be:

- An "on track" meal - you're going to make choices that align closely with your goals. We can help you do this by reviewing the menu with you beforehand.
- A "free" meal - your cheat meal or a special occasion where you've decided to enjoy it fully without tracking

Both are valid. The key is deciding intentionally rather than defaulting by accident. When you make the choice consciously, there's no guilt - just a decision you made with full awareness.

AT THE RESTAURANT — SMART ORDERING STRATEGIES

You're at the table. Here's how to navigate the menu like a pro.

1.

ANCHOR YOUR MEAL AROUND PROTEIN

Whatever you order, make sure there's a solid protein source at the center of it. Protein keeps you full, supports muscle retention, and is the hardest macronutrient to overeat.

Look for:

- Grilled, baked, or roasted chicken, fish, shrimp, steak, or turkey
- Egg-based dishes at brunch
- Legumes, tofu, or tempeh at plant-based restaurants

Avoid breaded and fried proteins when possible - not because they're "bad," but because the calories add up quickly without adding much satiety.

2.

CONTROL THE COOKING METHOD

The same ingredient can have dramatically different calorie counts depending on how it's prepared.

When in doubt, ask for:

- Grilled, baked, steamed, or roasted instead of fried or sautéed
- Sauces and dressings on the side so you control how much you use
- Olive oil instead of butter when possible
- Extra vegetables instead of starchy sides like fries or pasta

3.

BE SMART ABOUT SIDES

Sides are where restaurant meals often go sideways. A great protein entrée paired with french fries, creamy coleslaw, and a buttery dinner roll is a very different meal than the same entrée paired with a side salad and steamed vegetables.

Simple swaps:

- Fries → side salad, steamed vegetables, or a baked potato
- Creamy pasta → extra vegetables or a small portion of rice
- Buttered bread → skip it, or have one piece without butter
- Creamy soup → broth-based soup or skip the soup course

4. WATCH YOUR LIQUID CALORIES

Drinks are one of the easiest places to unknowingly consume a massive amount of calories and sugar. A cocktail, a soda, a flavored lemonade - these add up fast without making you feel any fuller.

- Choose water, sparkling water, diet soda, or unsweetened iced tea as your primary drink
- If you're having alcohol, stick to lower-calorie options (light beer, wine, spirits with soda water) and limit to 1–2 drinks
- Avoid sugary cocktails, frozen drinks, and sweetened sodas on nights when you're trying to stay on track

5. USE THE PLATE METHOD

If you're not tracking macros at a restaurant, use the plate method as a simple visual guide:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate: vegetables (salad, steamed veg, roasted vegetables)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate: lean protein (chicken, fish, steak, tofu)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate: complex carbs (rice, potato, pasta, bread)

This doesn't require any math or tracking - just a rough mental picture of your plate before you eat.

6. SLOW DOWN AND EAT MINDFULLY

Restaurants are social environments and that's a great thing. Use the conversation and the atmosphere to naturally slow down your eating. Put your fork down between bites. Drink water throughout the meal. Check in with your hunger levels halfway through. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to register fullness, so eating slowly gives your body time to catch up with your stomach.

7. SLOW DOWN AND EAT MINDFULLY

You are paying for your meal. You are allowed to ask for modifications. Most restaurants are very accommodating, especially for simple requests like:

- "Can I substitute the fries for a side salad?"
- "Can I get the dressing on the side?"
- "Can I get extra vegetables instead of the pasta?"
- "Can you cook that in olive oil instead of butter?"

Don't feel embarrassed or high-maintenance. This is your health and your money. Ask.

NAVIGATING SPECIFIC RESTAURANT TYPES

Different cuisines present different challenges and opportunities. Here's a quick guide:

AMERICAN / CASUAL DINING

Best choices: Grilled proteins (chicken, salmon, steak), salads with dressing on the side, vegetable sides, broth-based soups

Watch out for: Massive portions, loaded appetizers, heavy sauces, bread baskets, and combo meals

Pro tip: Most casual dining portions are 2x what you need. Consider splitting an entrée or boxing up half before you start eating.

ITALIAN

Best choices: Grilled fish or chicken, tomato-based pasta sauces (marinara, pomodoro), minestrone soup, salads, bruschetta in moderation

Watch out for: Creamy sauces (alfredo, carbonara), large pasta portions, garlic bread, and heavy appetizers

Pro tip: Order a protein entrée with a side salad instead of a pasta main. Or if you want pasta, choose a tomato-based sauce and share the portion.

MEXICAN

Best choices: Grilled proteins (fajita-style chicken, shrimp, or steak), black beans, salsa, guacamole in moderation, corn tortillas over flour, salads with fresh toppings

Watch out for: Chips and queso before the meal, fried dishes (chimichangas, taquitos), sour cream, shredded cheese, and oversized burritos

Pro tip: A fajita bowl with rice, black beans, salsa, and grilled protein is one of the best high-protein, balanced meals you can order at any restaurant.

ASIAN (CHINESE, THAI, JAPANESE)

Best choices: Sushi and sashimi, steamed dumplings, stir-fries with lean proteins and vegetables (ask for light sauce), miso soup, edamame, poke bowls

Watch out for: Fried rice, fried appetizers (spring rolls, tempura), thick sweet sauces (General Tso's, orange chicken), and large noodle dishes

Pro tip: Ask for sauce on the side, and steamed instead of fried wherever possible.

FAST FOOD (YES, IT HAPPENS)

Best choices: Grilled chicken sandwiches (without heavy sauces), salads with grilled protein, protein-style burgers (lettuce wrap), egg white options at breakfast

Watch out for: Supersized portions, combo meals that automatically add fries and a large drink, creamy sauces and dressings, and the value meal "upsell"

Pro tip: Order a la carte rather than as a combo. A grilled chicken sandwich on its own is a perfectly reasonable meal. Adding large fries and a soda doubles the calories.

BRUNCH

Best choices: Eggs any style, smoked salmon, avocado toast in moderation, Greek yogurt with fruit, omelettes with vegetables

Watch out for: Pancakes, waffles, French toast, pastries, bottomless mimosas, and sugary coffee drinks

Pro tip: Protein first – eggs or a protein-rich main then fill in with sides. Brunch menus are full of delicious but calorie-dense sweet options that are easy to overdo.

AFTER THE MEAL — GETTING BACK ON TRACK

You enjoyed dinner out. Maybe you ordered the pasta. Maybe you had dessert. Maybe you had an extra glass of wine. Here's what to do next:

DON'T PUNISH YOURSELF

Skipping meals the next day, doing extra cardio to "burn it off," or feeling guilty for hours are all counterproductive. They damage your relationship with food and don't actually improve your physical results. No meal requires punishment.

GET BACK TO YOUR ROUTINE IMMEDIATELY

The next meal after a restaurant meal should be a normal, on-track meal - not a "restart Monday" situation. The faster you return to your routine, the less impact any single meal has on your overall progress. Don't let one meal turn into a bad day, a bad weekend, or a bad week.

AFTER THE MEAL - GETTING BACK ON TRACK

DRINK EXTRA WATER

Restaurant meals tend to be higher in sodium, which can cause temporary water retention. Drink plenty of water the day after eating out to flush excess sodium and reduce bloating. The scale may be up a pound or two - this is water, not fat. It will typically pass within 24–48 hours.

MOVE YOUR BODY

A walk, a workout, or any kind of movement the day after eating out helps restore insulin sensitivity, burn off any excess glycogen, and get your digestion moving. This isn't punishment - it's just good practice.

ZOOM OUT

Look at your week as a whole, not individual meals in isolation. If you had a great restaurant meal with friends on Thursday, look at Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Chances are the vast majority of your meals were on point. That's what matters.

EATING OUT QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Before you go:

- ☐ Look up the menu online in advance
- ☐ Eat a protein-rich snack 1–2 hours before
- ☐ Drink a glass of water before leaving
- ☐ Decide what kind of meal this is (on track / flexible / fully off)

At the restaurant:

- ☐ Anchor your meal around a protein source
- ☐ Ask for sauces and dressings on the side
- ☐ Choose grilled, baked, or steamed over fried
- ☐ Swap sides for vegetables or salad where possible
- ☐ Drink water throughout the meal
- ☐ Eat slowly and check in with your hunger halfway through
- ☐ Don't be afraid to customize your order

After the meal:

- ☐ No guilt – get back to your routine at the next meal
- ☐ Drink extra water to manage sodium and bloating
- ☐ Move your body the next day
- ☐ Zoom out – look at the week as a whole, not the single meal



A NOTE FROM YOUR COACH

Eating out is one of life's great pleasures. Food is culture, connection, celebration, and joy. The goal of your health journey is never to eliminate those experiences - it's to learn how to participate in them in a way that still moves you toward your goals.

You don't have to choose between a social life and a healthy body. With the strategies in this guide, you can have both. And over time, making smart choices at restaurants will stop feeling like effort and start feeling like second nature.

Enjoy your next meal out. You've earned it.

Let's keep building,
MakeWaves Coaches

