**How to entertain and eat out the healthy way**

It’s always difficult trying to stick to a healthy diet when dining out or hosting in your home.

This is when temptation abounds – it’s easy to cave to pressure or convenience and then feel remorse afterwards.

“The good news,” says Dr Mosima Mabunda, Head of Wellness at Vitality SA, “is that just a few, small but sensible habits can make a huge difference to your health – plus they can drastically simplify your decision-making process when you’re overwhelmed by a menu or dinner-party planning.”

**Regularly eating out can sabotage your health and weight-loss efforts**

The global fast-food market is projected to grow from USD 972.74 billion in 2021 to USD 1,467.04 billion by 2028[[1]](#footnote-1). These meals are much more likely to contain far more calories, unhealthy fats, salt and sugar than wholesome home-cooked meals, so the implications of this growth are more often than not made visible by our waistlines!

Eating out regularly not only ups the likelihood of weight gain, but it can also increase your risk for chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. In addition, portion sizes have gradually increased over the years with servings in restaurants and take away outlets being up to double or even triple the size than what is appropriate for one person[[2]](#footnote-2).

Add to this the option of eating multiple courses, high calorie side dishes, free bread, creamed and sweetened vegetables and a plethora of dessert choices, and it’s easy to see why often eating away from home can sabotage your health and weight-loss efforts.

**Healthier eating out starts here**

When eating out, Dr Mabunda suggests that you plan ahead, consider the menu before choosing a restaurant and choose foods carefully:

* **Don't go hungry:** If you sit down starving, before you know it, you’ll have eaten several buttered rolls before your meal even arrives. Rather have a snack before you leave, like a piece of fruit or a yoghurt.
* **Have a plan:** If you know ahead of time that you're going to a restaurant, plan to have lighter meals during the day. Look up the menu online to search for healthier options.
* **Limit your portion size:** Choose a salad and then a starter as your main meal, share a meal with a friend, or even ask the waiter to pack half the meal in a takeaway container for later.
* **Consider how the food is prepared:** Don't be afraid to ask about how a food is cooked or for substitutions. Avoid foods described as ‘fried,' 'battered,' or 'creamy'. Stick with ones that are baked, grilled, poached, steamed or stir-fried.
* **Skip the high-fat dressings and sauces:** Alternatively, ask for them to be served separately, and use them sparingly. A salad is just as delicious drizzled with balsamic vinegar or lemon juice with a little olive oil.
* **Watch out for sauces:** High-fat sauces are often found in dishes such as lasagne, cannelloni and moussaka. Rather order grilled fish with a salad or vegetables.
* **Ditch the chips and wedges:** Rather order a side salad.
* **Beware of deep-fried foods.** Spring rolls, samoosas and other crispy, battered deep-fried foods have a high fat and calorie content.
* **Avoid the traditional breakfast fry-up:** Rather opt for scrambled or poached eggs with grilled tomato, mushrooms and baked beans, or fruit-topped oats. Try to limit refined and high fat carbs, such as crumpets, croissants, and other pastries.
* **Eat slowly:** It can take a while for your brain to get the message from your stomach that you’re no longer hungry. Eating fast may lead to overeating, while eating slow can help you eat less but still feel satisfied.

When choosing from a **take-away menu**, consider the following:

* If you’re a meat-eater, stick to outlets that serve grilled fish and chicken over red meat.
* Choose corn on the cob, a green salad or roast veg instead of chips.
* Avoid over-sized burgers and adding extra cheese and sauces.
* Deep-fried chicken pieces, nuggets and chicken burgers are often loaded with fat and calories, so rather avoid these.
* Hotdogs, boerewors rolls and pies are best avoided.
* Choose whole-wheat breads, wraps, subs or rolls where possible and keep to fillings such as lean steak, chicken, tuna and salad or grilled vegetables.
* Order pizzas in smaller sizes with a variety of vegetables and avoid toppings such as salami, bacon, ham, sausage, chorizo, brie, ribs and extra cheese.
* At sushi bars and Asian take-aways, healthier options include sashimi (raw fish), soups and lightly stir-fried vegetable dishes. Go lightly on the soy sauce, and choose a reduced sodium version, as it’s very high in salt.

**Entertaining**

When you have guests over, it can be difficult to find a healthy middle ground. Here are some of Dr Mabunda’s guidelines to up the nutrients at your next dinner party:

* For snacks on arrival, serve vegetable crudités or homemade baked vegetable crisps with healthy dips such as guacamole, cottage cheese or hummus.
* Wholewheat bruschetta (thin slices of grilled bread) with a mixture of chopped tomatoes, olive oil, garlic and fresh basil are a healthy option for finger foods.
* If you have guests over for a barbeque, try something different such as whole fish wrapped in foil, or a butterflied chicken stuffed with mushrooms. Add grilled sweetcorn and peppers as extra vegetables and be creative with your salads.
* Don’t dress the salads. By leaving your vinaigrette or dressing in a ramekin or jug on the side of the salad, you put control into the hands of your guests.
* Make smart swaps of ingredients in recipes, where possible. Think plain yoghurt instead of mayo or sour cream, use a reduced-fat feta or ricotta instead of hard cheeses and olive oil instead of butter.
* Include plain spices and herbs in your creations – this adds flavour without the need for too much salt, and make your own [stock](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/flavourful-vegetables).
* Always give your guests the option of upping their water intake by leaving jugs of water with sliced lemon or fresh fruit and ice on the table.
* Fancy something sweet? Your friends won’t even notice that a plate of fruit is being put in front of them if it’s styled beautifully. If you want to be more indulgent, try these healthy desserts: [roasted pineapples with ginger and yoghurt](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/roasted-pineapples-ginger-yoghurt) or [chocolate tart with nut crust](https://www.discovery.co.za/portal/individual/chocolate-tart-with-nut-crust)

If you enjoy dining out or entertaining, don't think you have to stop if you want to stay healthy. With some preparation and savvy substitutions, you can order and prepare nutritious and delicious meals.

1. [Fast food market](https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/fast-food-market-106482) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. # [Restaurant Portion Sizes Contribute To Obesity Epidemic](https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/03/29/portion-sizes)

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)