

Nutritional Nuggets

Westchester County Health Department

VOLUME V



Life in the Fast Lane - Nutrition & Fast Food



Wendy's, McDonald's, Burger King, Subway. These are just a few of the many fast food restaurants in Westchester. In fact, there are at least 170 fast food establishments in the County and over 300,000 in the United States. On any given day, one out of four Americans buys a fast food meal because it is convenient, fast, predictable, relatively inexpensive and close to home.

But fast food is often high in calories, sodium, fat and cholesterol. This is of particular concern in light of the growing problem of overweight and obesity in this country in both adults and children.

Portion sizes served at fast food restaurants have become increasingly larger over the years. "Portion size" is defined as the amount of food a person eats. There are no standard portion sizes. In contrast, a "serving size" is a standard amount that guides us as to how much to eat and identifies the amount of calories and nutrients in the food. In the 1950s, the average size of a soda was 6 ½ ounces, which contained about 87 calories. A 20-ounce soda with 267 calories is now considered to be average. Bagels used to weigh between 2 and 3 ounces and contained about 150 calories. Today, the average bagel weighs 4 to 7 ounces and has 300 or more calories per bagel.

Value meals have become very popular. Fast food chains offer more food for only a slight increase in cost. This "super-sizing" encourages us to buy and eat more food under the premise that it is a good value. For an additional 29 - 40 cents, a fast food meal can be super-sized by as much as 400

calories. Super-combo meals consisting of a large drink and fries are often **less expensive** than the same entrée with a small drink and fries.

Compare These Two Meals



McDonald's Hamburger, Small Fries,
16 oz. Coke
640 calories, 20 g fat, 30 mg cholesterol



McDonald's Quarter-Pound
Cheeseburger, Large Fries,
42 oz. Coke
1480 calories, 56 g fat, 95 mg cholesterol

These facts are not meant to scare you away from fast food entirely. Rather, they are intended to provide you with information needed to make better fast food choices and to encourage you to think about what to order. Fast food, in moderation, can be part of a balanced, healthy diet.

Fast Food Tips

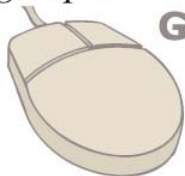
The following general guidelines can help you make healthy fast food choices:

- Avoid "super-sized" meals.
- Choose salads but be careful to look at the ingredients. If creamy salad dressing is used, the calorie and fat content may be similar to that of a hamburger! Try vinaigrette or reduced-calorie dressing instead.
- Order single patty burgers or meat sandwiches with lettuce and tomato, ketchup or mustard. Avoid special sauces, mayonnaise, cheese and bacon.
- Use mustard dressing in place of mayonnaise.

- Pass up fried fish sandwiches and other fried foods because they are usually among the highest fat options. Try grilled, broiled or steamed menu items instead. Opt for baked potatoes instead of French fries.
- Select thin-crust pizza with vegetable toppings instead of higher-fat pepperoni or sausage.
- Order soft flour or corn tortillas, quesadillas or burritos with beans, chicken or vegetables. Ask for low-fat condiments such as salsa or non-fat sour cream. Avoid fried tortillas and regular sour cream.
- Choose milk, 100% fruit juice or water in place of shakes and sodas. If drinking soda, buy the 12-ounce size instead of the "super-sized" portion (often 42 ounces).
- Fast food tends to be high in sodium, which is a concern if you have high blood pressure. Many fast food establishments have printed nutrition information (available on request) outlining the calorie, fat and sodium content of specific menu items.



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Fast Food Surprises

Fast food chains have noticed that consumers are more health conscious, and as a result, many chains are adding healthier choices to their menus. Here are a few examples:

Wendy's Chili

Small (8 oz.) serving

270 calories

5 g fat

35 mg cholesterol

(Omit cheddar cheese to eliminate 70 calories and 6 g fat)

McDonald's Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

200 calories

6 g fat

70 mg cholesterol

Croutons add 15 calories and 1½ g of fat. A packet (¼ cup) of creamy Caesar dressing has 190 calories and 18 g of fat. Opt for the low-fat balsamic vinaigrette dressing (40 calories, 3 g fat) or use ½ packet of creamy dressing.

Burger King Santa Fe Fire Grilled Chicken Baguette

350 calories

5 g fat

45 mg cholesterol

Subway's Subs

New "Select Subs" (Honey Mustard Ham, Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki, and Red Wine Vinaigrette Club) range from:

310 - 370 calories

5 - 6 g fat

25 - 50 mg cholesterol

McDonald's Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait

160 calories

2 g fat

5 mg cholesterol

A good choice for breakfast, lunch, or a snack