

12 Tips for Eating Better at Fast Food Establishments

Life gets busy. You've barely made it back from work and you're off driving your kids to soccer, dance, football and scouts or picking them up. There's no time to eat and/or there is nothing in the refrigerator at home so you find yourself doing the fast food thing.

Relax. You're not alone. Use these tips to help you eat as healthy as possible at your favorite fast food establishment.

- *Set new parameters.* Take your children aside and tell them that starting now when you eat at fast food places there will be new rules in place and you expect them to be followed. Then tell them about your new guidelines.
- *Order milk.* From now on, order milk as their beverage, not soda.
- *Choose wisely.* Certain fast food restaurants have naturally more nutritious choices than others. Some offer salad bars, baked potatoes, chili, grilled low-fat entrees, etc. Starting today, decide that it's worth it to go a little bit out of the way to get a more healthy selection of foods.
- *Order for them.* Until they start ordering more nutritionally, order for them. They'll whine and complain and pout at first. Make sure you tell them in advance you will be ordering for them and why. If they don't eat it, that's ok. It's their choice whether to eat better or go hungry. Try not to ever make food a battle ground.
- *Limit French Fries Part I.* Give your child 8 French fries with his entrée. Do not give him or her any more French fries until the entrée is finished.
- *Limit French Fries Part II.* If you are ordering happy meals for your children to get the toy of the day, take out one packet of French fries and share them between the siblings. Toss the other. You can either waste them in the trash can or waste them on your kid's backside in the form of stored fat. It's your choice.
- *Easy on the mayo.* If your children are eating "big kid" fare, make sure you order sandwiches "easy on the mayo" and other secret sauces.
- *Choose hamburgers over cheese burgers.* Cheese is a good source of calcium, protein and fat. If you feel your child consumes plenty of milk, cheese and dairy products already and/or if he or she tends to be a little heavy set, steer your child to hamburgers over cheeseburgers.
- *Avoid deep-fried fare.* Also if your children are old enough to venture into the adult menu board, remember that if it is breaded and crunchy, it's deep-fried. Direct your kids to non-fried entrées like the broiled chicken breast sandwich which most fast food establishments now have.
- *Order a side salad.* If you have children who prefer lettuce- and tomato-free entrees, order a side salad to split amongst the table. Do not give them more French fries until they eat at least a bite of the salad. This will make them realize that eating fresh produce is "just what you do," like brushing your teeth in the morning. Over time, they will acquire a taste for it and expect it with a meal.
- *No sweets.* Do not order a cookie or ice cream or any other type of sweets. Eating out is the treat, not the sweet.
- *Play actively.* If you're at a fast food establishment with a play set, make sure your kids play on the play set and NOT on the video games machines that are also frequently available.

Good luck!