

Dining Out with a Chronic Illness on a Special Diet

If you are an individual with chronic illness and on a special diet, such as kidney disease or diabetes, part of your planning may include eating out. How often you eat out and what you eat will determine how careful you need to be in your meal choices. If you are an individual that eats out often, you may have to watch your food choices more closely to match your meal plan.

If you are an individual that eats out rarely, it may be that you can vary from your plan for just one meal.

If you are a diabetic and on insulin, you should schedule injections around your dining out. An example: a delay in a meal, you may want to take your insulin at your regular time, and have your scheduled snack when you would normally eat your dinner.



Of course, discuss dining out with your nutritionist or health care provider about ways to adjust your meal and your insulin injections.

With any change in the meal schedule:

- Always plan ahead for any meal change
- Be aware of your food groups and adjust your meal plan for the day

- Be aware of portion sizes of food groups, especially limited or restricted foods
- Try to decide ahead of time what you are going to order based on your meal plan
- If you know where you are going out to eat, call ahead and see if they cater to special needs

Eating out can mean more fat, more sugar, more salt and calories than you use at home. Here are a few tips that may help you to plan your “meals out”.

- Choose broiled, oven roasted steamed, poached, blackened, grilled, barbequed rather than fried, au gratin, creamed, sautéed, or foods made with butter.
- Choose “heart healthy” or “light” choices from the menu
- Request that salad dressings, mayonnaise, butter, margarine, sour cream and oils be served “on the side”
- Use low calorie products when you can
- When ordering soups, order clear soups, broths or vegetable based soups instead of cream based soups.
- When possible, try to avoid salads made with mayonnaise such as chicken, tuna, bean, potato or pasta salads.
- Choose salads made with fresh raw vegetables
- When ordering vegetables, ask that they are steamed, and not cooked in butter or cream sauces when cooked.





- Avoid bread made with white flour, sweet rolls and muffins
- Do not add salt at the table. Try using a lemon wedge or vinegar to season your food. Or bring your own Mrs. Dash
- Determine your portions and ask for a “doggie bag” or share your meals with someone else at the table, so you do not over eat.
- Avoid fast food restaurants as much as possible. The foods served in those places are very high in fat, sugar saturated fat, sodium and sugar. They also are very low in fiber.
- Do not allow one trip to a fast food restaurant ruin your meal planning.
- On days when you are eating out, a little extra exercise that day would help to lower your blood sugar, if you are a diabetic.

Eating out or entertaining family and friends is important to maintaining socialization, as we get older. It should be an enjoyable activity and something to look forward to. Having a chronic illness and following a special diet do not have to change this. It may mean that you make adjustments to the meals and snacks you plan to eat that day.

Dining out just takes a little planning on your part. Knowing and feeling comfortable with your meal plan and restrictions will make eating out easier.

