EATING OUT HEALTHFULLY

Busy families trying to balance work, school, and outside activities often find themselves eating meals out in order to fit a quick meal into an overloaded schedule. It is possible to select choices at restaurants and fast food locations that support the nutrition needs of growing children. The key lies in planning ahead and selecting restaurants that offer health choices. The strategies below are aimed at helping busy families make the healthiest choices possible when eating out.

Tips for ordering from a restaurant menu:

Beverages:
- Opt for water, low-fat milk, or 100% fruit juice instead of soda. Soda provides only empty calories and many contain caffeine, which children do not need.

Portion Sizes:
- Purchase child-sized portions (Kid’s Meals) for your preschooler. Children do not need to be ordering off of the adult menu, nor do they need double meat burgers or super-sized meals.
- As a parent, avoid the temptation to super-size your meal. Although the increase in cost may be minimal, the added calories from a value-sized meal are not what you want to be filling your body with.
- Remember – You do not have to eat until you are stuffed. You can always have a healthy snack later on, so resist the urge to go overboard when eating out.

Limit foods that are fried, including French fries, onion rings, chicken, fish, and meat. Instead choose grilled, baked, roasted, or broiled items.
- If you desire fries, order a small serving and share them amongst your family. Just a few fries might help meet your craving without undoing your intent to have an overall healthy meal.
- Grilled chicken nuggets or a single patty burger are lower in calories and fat than fried chicken and fish sandwiches.

Look for healthy options to fix up your meal.
- Request your burger or sandwich be served on a whole wheat bun and request extra lettuce, tomato, onion, and other vegetable toppings.
- Choose corn or wheat tortillas over flour tortillas and brown rice over white or fried rice.
- Select side items such as fruit cups, apple slices, carrot sticks, baked chips, pretzels, steamed vegetables, side salads, black beans, or whole pinto beans (not refried).
- A fruit and yogurt parfait can be a great option for your child at breakfast, as a dessert with your meal, or as an afternoon snack.

Watch out for salad dressings and sauces that are high in calories.
- Ask for dressings and sauces to be served on the side, this way you can determine how much to put on your salad or sandwich.
- Toppings that are high in fat and calories include: mayonnaise, tartar sauce, salad dressings, sour cream, and any cheese based sauce. Instead of these toppings choose catsup, mustard, light salad dressings, and salsa, which are all lower in calories and fat.
- Select tomato sauce for pasta instead of alfredo or cheese sauce.

Make informed choices.
- Many restaurants have the nutrition information for their menu items available online. Review the information ahead of time to determine what the healthiest options are.
- Check-out the menu boards and menus! You may be surprised to find the nutrition information is now being listed in easy to locate spots and use this information to make informed choices!
- Provide your child healthy choices to select from when dining out.

REFERENCES:
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:
American Heart Association:
http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/HealthierKids/HowtoMakeaHealthyHome/Tips-to-Make-Fast-Food-Friendlier-for-Kids_UCM_303806_Article.jsp#.VmdDLriDPHw