

SECONDARY STRATEGY # 4 – BE CHOOSY WHEN YOU GO OUT - FAST FOOD DAMAGE CONTROL

Just stop for a moment and think of all of the types of fast foods you know of. Make a list – it's certain to be a long one. The number of places where you can go to have "fast food" and the number of choices available at those places can be mind-boggling.

So, what is fast food? Basically, it's food that is convenient. It's made fast (and not made by you) and it's easy to package. It's also easy to eat on the run, since, it's usually finger food.

The need for food to be fast and convenient has become a fact of life for many people and their families. A lot of families eat at fast food restaurants several times per week. For many young people with hectic schedules, fast food has become something that you "grab" because you can't afford the time to stop and eat something else. But fast food is about more than convenience. The food is cheap. You might also think there's value in it, meaning that you get more for your money. A visit to a fast food place is marketed as not just a place to get cheap food but also a place where you go to have a good time. You go there for the "experience," in other words.

Now, this section isn't about to tell you not to have fun. No, the idea here is just to be a little more aware of your commitment to eat healthier whenever you visit a fast food place. The problem is this – although fast foods can be fast and fun, they are usually not made with your health in mind. Most of the choices are unbalanced from a nutritional point of view - they are high in calories, fat, sugar and/or salt. They are usually low in whole grains, lean meats, vegetables, fiber and lacking in many of the nutrients that your body requires. Now, eating this type of food once in a while (maybe two or three times a month or so, for example) isn't really a problem for your health. But many people eat this type of food a few times a week. In other words, too often.

Fast Food Damage Control

Eat less of it.

Make fewer visits to fast food restaurants. Replace those visits with meals and snacks that are healthier. This doesn't mean that you can't ever set foot inside a fast food place again; it just means that you commit to only going there occasionally.

If lunch is the main meal you go to a fast-food place for, then brown bag it. Prepare a lunch at home and take it with you. How about a sandwich made with lean meats and whole grain bread? Add a bit of cheese and some vegetables and there you go! Or be adventurous - try different sandwich fillings or different kinds of bread – whole-wheat tortillas, pitas, or submarine buns. Try different toppings like salsa or BBQ sauce. If you have a way to heat your lunch, try soup or leftovers from the previous night's dinner.

"If you can't beat 'em, join 'em."

If you don't feel you can eat fast food less often, the next best thing is to healthier choices when you do go there. Most fast-food places now offer menu choices that are healthier in some way. Many of these choices are lower in fat and calories. In some cases, you may have to ask about healthier choices because these items are often not shown on menus in the same way as the unhealthier choices. Watch for words like "low fat," "lean," "fat reduced," or "light." If you don't see these items offered, then ask the server if the restaurant has them.



A Guide for making healthier choices

TRY:	INSTEAD OF:
Plain hamburgers	Cheeseburgers
Grilled Chicken sandwiches	Fried Chicken / Fish Sandwiches
Vegetable Pizza	Meat Pizza with double cheese
Sub sandwiches with lean meats and Vegetables. Hold the cheese.	Sub sandwiches made with cheese and high-fat meat.
Plain baked potatoes - Hold the cheese and sour cream	French fries or potato skins
Chili. Avoid added cheese or sour cream	Fries
Soup made with a water-base	Soup made with a cream-base
Salads with dressing on the side	Other side dishes like fries
Plain Ice cream or low-fat Frozen Yogurt or Fruit Sorbet	Pies, cakes, cookies, donuts, sundaes
Unsweetened fruit juice, low-fat milk, Water	Soda pop, shakes, frosty drinks
Mustard or dressing / sauce on the side	Mayonnaise, gravy or sauce on the sandwich

Keep things basic

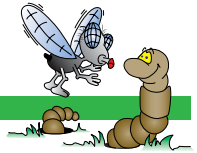
Look for items on the menu that are basic or plain. These choices are often a little healthier compared to the choices with all of the "extras" or "add-ons" like cheese, bacon, mayonnaise, sauce or gravy. For example, a basic hamburger can provide a serving of a grain product (the bun) and a serving of a protein food (the meat). Although the bun is not whole grain and the meat may not necessarily be lean or be prepared in a low-fat way, this choice is still better than the higher fat double cheeseburger with extra everything or a chicken or fish sandwich that has been breaded and fried. Order a healthier side dish like a salad instead of fries, onion rings or chips and order low-fat milk or unsweetened fruit juice instead of drinking soda pop.

Watch the "lingo"

Become aware of the words used to describe some menu items. The language used can often give you an idea about the fat and calorie content of the choice. Try to make choices from items described as grilled, broiled, charbroiled, baked, roasted or stir-fried. Avoid foods with descriptions such as fried, deep-fried, crispy, crunchy, golden brown, cheesy, creamy or buttery. Watch out for breaded fish or chicken sandwiches. They are usually higher calorie choices than plain hamburgers or grilled chicken, if it's available. Other words to avoid are "rich," "decadent," "deluxe," and "super": these are choices that will likely be high in fat and extra calories and low on nutrition.

Don't "super-size" – extra large portions of fast foods eaten on a regular basis will usually only result in your body becoming a "super-size." Try ordering the smaller sized portion for a change - or split the regular sized one with a friend.

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Other ideas to consider:

- Be aware of fast food "situations" – As mentioned earlier in this strategy, many of your visits to a fast food place will be made when you are out with friends or when you are in a rush. It's fine to have fun but it doesn't have to mean that you abandon your efforts to eat healthier. After all, it's usually not where you go or what you eat that makes an outing fun but rather it's the people you're with. With that in mind, you can still have a good time with your friends and eat a little healthier at the same time. And who knows, if you show respect for your health and body by trying to eat a little healthier and be more responsible in your food choices, maybe it will catch on with your friends too.
- Change the way you think of fast food. The main idea here is to think of fast-food meals as something you eat occasionally or "once-in-a-while" rather than on a regular basis.

When it comes to fast food, have a good time but don't abandon your commitment to eat healthier. Look for healthier alternatives whenever possible and consider eating less fast food. Your body will thank you for it!

Choose health – Be Choosy When You Go Out.