

# “How can I eat healthy when I’m on the go?”

## What to watch for if you have to eat fast food.



We’ve all been there. You’re in a rush and don’t have time to stop at the grocery store or make something healthy for lunch or dinner. You choose to stop at the nearest fast food restaurant and grab something quick and easy to eat for you or the family. Your choice may be convenient, **but is it healthy?**

The foods we eat should provide our bodies with the nutrients, vitamins and minerals necessary to keep our bodies nourished and healthy. However, not all foods are created equal.

Although it’s important to watch your calorie intake, **it’s also important to pay attention to the type of food you eat.** Two hundred calories of fruit is much healthier than two hundred calories of French fries from a fast food restaurant. For long-term health, weight control and disease prevention, the quality of nutrients matters more than the quantity.

Fast foods, convenience store foods or junk foods typically contain an abundance of saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and sodium, all of which negatively affect the cardiovascular system. Most fast foods are also processed foods. In other words, they are not in their natural state. They contain preservatives, flavor enhancers and other ingredients that are high in calories and low in nutrients.

### **Too much fat in your diet can be very detrimental to your health.**

Diets high in unhealthy fats have been directly related to high cholesterol. High cholesterol increases your risk of blockages in your arteries, increasing your chances for high blood pressure, heart attack or stroke.

### **Evidence from studies has shown that teenagers and adults who frequently eat fast foods are more prone to overeating and weight gain.**

One study\* followed 3,000 young adults for 13 years. Those who had higher fast food consumption (more than twice a week) weighed an average of 13 pounds more than those who had the lowest fast food consumption (less than once a week). They also had larger waist measurements, a greater increase in fats in their bodies and double the risk for heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

To avoid indulging in too much fat, **become more aware of what you are eating.** Stop and read the nutritional labels. Avoid products containing “partially hydrogenated” oils or shortening often found in fried foods, baked goods, crackers and pies. And limit fast foods.

By decreasing the amount of fast food you eat while increasing your intake of vegetables, fruits and whole grain foods, you’ll consume fewer calories. At the same time, you’ll get more of the essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that fast foods lack. Pick up a recipe book with quick, healthy dinners. Check online for recipes, too. Keep a supply of healthy snacks in your car to help avoid temptation to grab some fast food. Make a healthy lunch for yourself at home and bring it to work. That way, you won’t be tempted to buy a lunch that’s not so healthy.

But what if you’re in a bind and have no choice but to stop and get fast food? Are there really any good fast food choices? Some choices are certainly better than others. Choose a chicken option instead of beef and, if possible, have it broiled or grilled rather than fried. Opt for a baked potato with salsa instead of French fries. Have whole grain bread and hold the cheese, bacon and mayonnaise. Have fresh veggies on top instead. Drink water with your meal rather than a high calorie drink. Many fast food restaurant menus will have healthy options as well as nutritional facts posted on menus. **Open your eyes to the healthy choices available to you.**

*\*Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) study, sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health*

