



Sports Nutrition Strategies for Eating Out

Eating meals out is often common practice for college athletes with busy training, competition, and class schedules. It is possible to select choices at restaurants and fast food locations that support the nutrition needs of athletes. The key lies in selecting restaurants that offer healthy choices and being informed about what the best options on the menu are. The strategies below are aimed at helping athletes make the best possible choices when eating out.

Tips for Ordering from a Restaurant Menu

- Beverages: Opt for water, low-fat milk, sports drinks, or 100% fruit juice instead of soda. Soda provides only empty calories and many contain caffeine.
- Portion Sizes: Avoid the temptation to super-size your meal. The added calories from French fries and a large drink are not the fuel you want to be providing your body with for training and competition.
- Limit foods that are fried, including French fries, onion rings, chicken, fish, and meat. Instead choose grilled, baked, roasted, or broiled items.
- Look for healthy sources of carbohydrates to add to your meal.
 - Request a whole wheat bun for your burger or sandwich. Instead of getting a double burger, order two hamburgers for extra carbohydrates from the buns.
 - Select side items such as fruit parfaits, baked chips, pretzels, baked potatoes, or rice.
- Vegetable and Fruit: Look for vegetable and fruit options on the menu and add them whenever possible.
 - Many fast food restaurants offer fruit cups, apple slices, and side salads; request these items with your meal in place of French fries.
 - Request extra lettuce, tomato, onion, and other vegetable options on your sandwich or burger.
 - A fruit and yogurt parfait can be a great addition at breakfast, as a dessert with your meal, or as an afternoon snack.
- Ask for sauces and salad dressings to be served on the side so you can control the amount that is added to your sandwich or salad.
 - Mayonnaise, salad dressing, tartar sauce, sour cream, and cheese sauces are high in fat and calories. Lower fat/calorie options include mustard, ketchup, salsa, and light salad dressings.

Top Choices When Eating Out

- **Breakfast**
 - Choose lean meats with breakfast such as ham, Canadian bacon, or turkey sausage instead of bacon or regular sausage.
 - Egg whites and egg substitutes are also lean sources of protein; moderate intake of whole eggs can be part of a balance sports nutrition diet.
 - Select whole grain carbohydrates when possible – oatmeal, cereal, bagels, English muffins, toast. Top these items with jelly, honey, and peanut butter.

- At fast food restaurants, opt for sandwiches made on English muffins or bagels instead of biscuits or croissants
- Have a fruit parfait or fruit cup on the side instead of hashbrown potatoes
- Pancakes or French toast with syrup can be a good source of carbohydrates, ask for the butter to be served on the side. French toast is made with egg, thus it also provides protein.

- **Fast Food**
 - Single patty burger on a whole wheat bun with extra vegetable toppings
 - Grilled chicken sandwich or chicken wrap, dressing on the side
 - Deli sandwich with lean meat (turkey, ham, roast beef), cheese, and a variety of vegetable toppings
 - Side items: Fruit cup, apple slices, fruit and yogurt parfait, side salad, baked chips

- **Mexican Restaurant**
 - Chicken or beef fajitas on corn or wheat tortillas, with rice and beans (borracho, black)
 - Burritos or bowls that include lean protein, rice, borracho or black beans, and lettuce/tomato/pico de gallo.
 - Top your meal with salsa, pico de gallo, corn salsa, avocado; limit sour cream, queso.
 - Request corn or wheat tortillas when possible instead of flour.
 - Side Items: Opt for whole beans (pinto, black) instead of refried; Rice is a great source of carbohydrates.
 - Limit the number of chips you eat before the meal arrives, these often fill you up without providing the nutrition quality you are looking for.

- **Italian Restaurant**
 - Select dishes with marinara (red) sauce instead of alfredo (white) sauce.
 - Select lean sources of protein to be included in your dish, such as chicken or seafood.
 - Request extra vegetables be added to your pasta.
 - Order your salad with the dressing on the side.
 - Bread sticks served with the meal can be enjoyed for extra carbohydrates, request the butter on the side so you can control the amount added.

- **Chinese Food**
 - Stir-fry dishes with lean protein (beef, chicken, seafood), vegetables, and brown rice
 - Lo mein entrees made with lean protein, vegetables, and Chinese noodles
 - Request extra vegetables be added into your entrée.
 - Select brown or white rice with your entrée instead of fried rice.
 - Limit heavily fried appetizers and sides, such as egg rolls and fried wontons.

References:

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Sports Nutrition Care Manual: Nutrition therapy for team sports. Accessed September 5, 2012 at: <http://www.nutritioncaremanual.org/>

Clark, Nancy. (2008). Nancy Clark's sports nutrition guidebook. 4th ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.