

Wellness Wednesday



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Hacks For Ordering Healthy Takeout And Delivery, By Cuisine

Chinese, Mexican, Italian and more — restaurant food can be made more nutritious with these tricks.

As nutrition information becomes more widely available and ingredient transparency is more widely demanded due to food allergies and sensitivities, people are continually stunned at the amount of empty, nutritionally deficient calories they're consuming when they dine out or order delivery.

But with a few easy fixes, you can hack your order and make it fit the ideal 1:1:2 ratio of carbs, protein and vegetables that professionals recommend.

After all, when you bring your food home, you're free to make additions, subtractions and substitutions however you please to make it more beneficially nutritious, no matter the type of cuisine you order.

Let's address some of the most common takeout and delivery cuisines you can easily make more nutritious.

Strategize Your Sandwiches

Every sandwich needs — to borrow Ross Gellar's term — a "moist-maker." For that reason, mayo is a must for many people. However, it's a caloric bomb, especially if it's slathered on with a heavy hand. The good news is, you have alternatives.

When ordering a sandwich, ask the restaurant to leave off the mayo so you can finish dressing it at home with your own. Sandwiches without mayo will be less soggy when you receive them anyway.

As registered dietician Casey McCoy reasons, "adding mayonnaise yourself allows you to choose how much goes on. If they do it for you, you may end up eating more than you normally would."

Another reason to sauce up at home? You can cut calories with canola oil mayonnaise or get on trend with avocado oil. However, McCoy recommends olive oil as "a better fat choice."

Aside from this simple swap, bringing a sandwich home also opens up a plethora of add-on and change-up choices, allowing you to deconstruct and customize it in the privacy of your own kitchen. There, no one will look at you askance if you take off a slice of bread to replace it with a few leaves of lettuce. And you won't get any odd looks, either, for completely taking apart your sandwich and putting it on a bowl of salad greens. Both are great ways to increase your vegetable intake, the nutritional value of the meal, and inch up to that 2:1:1 ratio.

Healthier Salad Hacks

If a salad typically doesn't fill you up, it's easy to convert it into something substantial that's still nutritious. Consider turning your salad into an overstuffed wrap using tortillas, lavash bread or pitas with better nutritional value than what is offered at most restaurants. Eschew the side of bread that usually accompanies a salad, and instead, look for whole grains, high fiber, higher protein and low sugar on the nutritional labels of home pantry staples.

Another great tip for salads is to ask for the cheese and/or sweet toppings like dried fruits and nuts on the side. Although "these additions are a great choice for a salad to actually be satisfying and fill you up appropriately," according to McCoy, getting the high-calorie ingredients on the side can help you personalize and control how much you're consuming.

For takeout, salad dressing is usually separated, so that's one less ask you have to make. This allows you to use just enough so that your greens aren't drowning in it. "Toss it in a big bowl at home while you add the dressing to make sure it's well-dressed," McCoy recommends, "or use some lemon for extra flavor instead of using more dressing."

Asian Takeout Additions

It's easy to increase the nutritional value of your Asian restaurant takeout when you order. For one, tofu is a nutritional superstar McCoy calls "a great and inexpensive source of protein that is very easily absorbed, and a rich source of isoflavones, which research has shown to have protective effects against cardiovascular disease and some cancers."

But even better, across the continent, vegetables feature heavily in most wok-fired dishes. Her pick is often Thai, which "tends to be a pretty healthy takeout pick because they have a lot of vegetable-heavy offerings."



You can also steam-crisp or stir-fry your own vegetables and then toss them in the sauce that came with your takeout. This can help re-proportion the dish to better fit the ideal ratio.

Boosting your vegetable quotient with a quick homemade sauté works for many of the more indulgent noodle dishes, too. Matchstick vegetables like carrots, broccoli stalks, bell peppers and cabbage blend in well with lo mein, drunken noodles, chow fun, mei fun, yaki udon, and more. For no-cook, no-fuss toss-ins, bean sprouts can contribute a refreshing bite to heavier noodle mains, as can sliced snow peas or chopped sugar snaps. For soups, adding baby bok choy is actually quite traditional, or add Chinese or nappa cabbage or romaine lettuce (don't knock it until you try it!).

Finally, you can ask for brown rice instead of white. McCoy says "you'll be adding fiber and nutrients that will make you feel more satisfied than refined grains like white rice."

Italian Updates

Pizza is often considered a cheat food, but there are multiple ways to make it more nutritious.

You know that slice is going to taste better after a few minutes in the toaster oven, so why not add some vegetables to it while you're at it? Ordering a plain cheese pizza (or a vegetable one) gives you wiggle room to control your ratios. You can add grilled chicken, turkey pepperoni, turkey sausage, or sautéed and drained lean ground beef to make the proteins lean, or steam spinach or broccoli to toss on top of a white pizza and let them get toasty. Alternatively, zucchini is a nice add-on for red-sauce pies, and peppers, onions, and mushrooms are classics.

"I like to order a Caesar salad with my pizza and/or add lots of vegetable toppings to it," McCoy said. "It sounds simple, but romaine is higher in vitamin A, folate, and fiber than kale or spinach, and anchovies have omega-3s, while olive oil is a monounsaturated fat, both of which can reduce the risk of heart disease."

Caesar and other salads are typically on the menu at any Italian restaurant or pizza parlor, but what isn't often advertised is that customers can usually request a side of steamed vegetables instead of the usual pasta side. This is typically some variation of a medley that may feature broccoli, zucchini, cauliflower, carrots and green beans. Sautéed or steamed broccoli, spinach and broccoli rabe are also often on offer, and they go better with marsala wine sauce dishes, française or piccata preps than clashing sauced pasta.

Latin American Twists

Food from this corner of the world is also easy to make healthy when you order. Two effortless changes would be to request no cheese or sour cream on your dish. Instead, add your own pre-grated cheese at home — it typically comes in nonfat, part-skim, 2% or whole fat options, but McCoy suggests forgoing fat-free options for something 2% or more. "Your body needs fat," cautions McCoy, "and fat-free isn't as satisfying and may cause you to overeat later."

To substitute for the sour cream, 2% Greek yogurt is an easy edit that keeps the flavors and mouth-feel indulgent while introducing helpful live and active cultures to your gut flora as well as increasing protein.

Establishments can often make other substitutions for you. Swapping white rice for brown, when available, is one of them. You can ask to swap rice for beans or request twice the peppers and onions in lieu of rice or in addition to it. Lettuce is also typically available, so just ask for it if you don't want a whole side salad!

When it comes to Mexican food like tacos, say "yes" to all the vegetable accompaniments: the pico de gallo, the charred green onions, the shredded cabbage or lettuce. In fact, while you're at it, dice up some more fresh tomatoes for their many vitamins and minerals and chop up more cabbage at home to bury your taco filling in, adding fiber as well as a palate-cleanser for the salt and char. Consider it more of a side than an accent.



You can also ask for corn tortillas instead of flour, which typically have far fewer calories. Corn is “less refined and contains more fiber,” than flour, McCoy said. Another alternative? Skip the tortillas entirely in dishes like fajitas, and turn them into rice and salad bowls.

The same applies for other types of Latin American food: Get a side salad with your Cuban or medianoche sandwich; ask for grilled veggies instead of rice or beans; add versatile sautéed zucchini to your ropa vieja or arroz con pollo; put your roasted pork on a salad; ask for your crema on the side and save your sweet plantains for dessert.

A Sweet Finish

And what’s dinner out without dessert? You can slightly moderate your indulgence by asking the restaurant to pack your dessert plain, skipping the restaurant’s embellishments such as whipped cream, ice cream, caramel sauces, chocolate drizzles, and the like. Instead, add your own at home. Use frozen yogurt, light ice cream or lighter whipped cream. Choose reduced sugar, no-sugar-added or added-fiber jams or jellies for accent flavors. Or just go with some fresh fruit. When you’re finishing the dish in your own kitchen, the choice is entirely yours.

As you can see, ordering in doesn’t mean having to leave your nutrition by the wayside. Go ahead and have that taco night, order the pizza after a busy day, call for Chinese, and get that dessert to split. You deserve it, and with these dietician-approved simple swaps and additions, you don’t even have to earn it.



SKINNY PUMPKIN SNICKERDOODLES



51 Calories | PREP TIME: 25 mins | COOK TIME: 5 mins | TOTAL TIME: 30 mins
YIELD: 42 Cookies | COURSE: Dessert | CUISINE: American

INGREDIENTS

1-3/4 cups King Arthur white whole wheat flour, or all purpose white
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp cream of tartar
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup butter, softened
1 tbsp honey or agave
1 tsp vanilla
1 large egg
3 tbsp sugar*
1 tbsp pumpkin spice
cooking spray

These Skinny Pumpkin Snickerdoodle cookies should really come with a warning label, because they are so good and hard to stop at just one!

TIPS:

These pumpkin snickerdoodle cookies are lighter than the traditional Snickerdoodles and made with white whole wheat flour instead for added fiber. You can add extra pumpkin pie spice to the batter if you want more pumpkin flavor.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 cookie, Calories: 51 kcal, Carbohydrates: 9.5 g, Protein: 1 g, Fat: 1 g, Saturated Fat: 0.5 g, Cholesterol: 7.5 mg, Sodium: 20 mg, Fiber: 1 g, Sugar: 6 g
Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS



How to make:

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line two baking sheets with Silpat mats and spray with cooking spray.

Combine flour, baking soda, and cream of tartar in a medium bowl, stirring with a whisk.

Combine 1 cup of sugar and butter in a large bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until well blended. Add the agave, vanilla and egg; beat well. Gradually add the flour mixture to the sugar mixture, beating just until combined. Cover and chill for 10 minutes.

In a medium bowl, combine 3 tbsp sugar with pumpkin pie spice, stirring with a whisk to combine. With wet hands (you can keep a cup of water close), shape dough into 42 (1-inch) balls. Roll balls in sugar/pumpkin pie spice mixture.

Place balls 2 inches apart onto baking sheets and slightly flatten with a fork.

Bake 375°F for 5-7 minutes (cookies will be slightly soft).

Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes. Remove from pans; cool completely on wire racks. Enjoy!

FEATURED EXERCISE

6 Slam Exercises Anyone Can Do

Overhead Slam

- 1.) Start standing with feet shoulder distance apart and core engaged.
- 2.) With ball in both hands, lift arms overhead until arms are straight.
- 3.) Throw the ball onto the ground in front of you as hard as you can.
- 4.) Squat down and pick up the ball, being careful to lift with your legs and not your back.
- 5.) Return to start position, then repeat for as many reps as desired.



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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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