

Eating Healthy on Vacation

We all know how tempting it can be to abandon our good sense while on vacation. When it comes to eating healthy, many of us tend to make poor choices and relax our restraint ... grabbing an ice cream cone here, a slice of pizza there ... But there are ways to keep watch over what we put in our mouths, and with some help from ASTA – along with some hard work and common sense -- your job should be made a little bit easier.

It is easy enough to request a low-fat or vegetarian meal on your airplane flight these days. But if you choose to drive to your destination, the quest to find healthy food on the road gets a little more complicated.

Rather than relying on roadside greasy spoons for nutrition, pack a variety of nutritious foods in a cooler filled with ice packs. Fruits and raw vegetables, sandwiches, individual packages of crackers, yogurt and granola bars are quick and easy solutions for the road. Also, pack a few bottles of water so you don't become tired and dehydrated while driving. If you have to stop at a drive-thru, try to order your hamburger without cheese, skip the condiments, choose grilled meats instead of fried and look to the salad bar for options whenever possible. Just make sure you don't drive too long without eating, always stop at a rest area to eat (especially with children, who run the risk of choking when fed while in a car seat) and stay away from sugary snacks.

When you arrive at your hotel, do yourself a favor and turn down the minibar key to avoid tempting yourself with goodies. If your hotel offers a Continental breakfast, stick to fruits, cereals and proteins such as eggs. Low-fat muffins are also a good alternative to sticky danishes and fat-laden donuts. If your hotel has a microwave or in-room refrigerator, consider bringing food from home whose nutrition content you already know. If worse comes to worst, you can always rely on the hotel coffee maker to heat water for oatmeal you've brought from home.

If you have to eat out, remember to eat only when hungry – don't fill up simply because it's free (if you're on a business trip) or because it's there. Restaurants tend to serve overwhelmingly large portions, so be wary. If you do overindulge at one meal, simply scale back a bit on the next. Forgive yourself for any "diet" blunders and take a walk around the hotel or swim in the pool. Also, try to find restaurants that will work with your needs: that broil instead of fry, cook with low-fat cheese, or use non-fat milk.

If you feel you can't fit in three square meals throughout the day, try to fit in six smaller meals or snacks as your body requires fuel every four to five hours. When eating out, either avoid the appetizers altogether; or choose appetizers instead of entrees to avoid eating oversized amounts of food. Whatever you do, don't skip meals.

When possible, avoid large meals at night. When your body slows down and readies itself for sleep, it also burns calories less efficiently. Pass up the bread basket at dinner, and certainly avoid the butter, margarine and oil that come along with it. Choose fish or poultry for your entrée, and make an effort to include lots of vegetables rather than French fries or cole slaw. Finally, moderate your desserts, choosing sorbet and not ice cream, fresh fruit and not cake. And definitely limit your alcohol intake – all those extra calories add up.

The following is a list of menu terms divided into two categories: those you should avoid and those you should embrace. Let these be your guide when all else fails.

Avoid these terms:

- » Buttery or buttered
- » Basted
- » Fried, French Fried, Crispy
- » Creamed, in gravy
- » Hollandaise
- » Au gratin or In cheese sauce
- » Scalloped
- » Rich

Look for these terms:

- » Stir fried
- » Steamed
- » Au jus (in its own juices)
- » Poached
- » Raw
- » Garden fresh

In short, trust your own good judgment and stick to your normal eating habits or as close to them as possible when away from home. Take care of yourself so you can have many happy, healthy vacations for years to come!