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NEWS RELEASE

Tips for Healthy Eating Out

Eating out can mean anything from the convenience of fast food to the luxury of a long, leisurely dining experience. Whichever style you choose, you can make it a healthier experience by checking the calories and unhealthy fat, cholesterol and trans fat on menu items.

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions, both in New York State and across the nation. Almost 60 percent of New York adults were overweight or obese according to a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey conducted by the New York State Department of Health in 2006. Overweight and obesity put them at increased risk for life-threatening conditions including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and some forms of cancer.

“Poor nutritional choices, especially when combined with lack of physical activity, are fueling the obesity epidemic. Eating out can be a big contributor to the problem of poor nutrition, but knowing what to look for on the menu and talking to your server can make the experience both pleasurable and healthy,” said Susanne Smith, Deputy Director of the Otsego County Department of Health.

The average adult needs about 2,000 calories a day. A single meal of a double hamburger, large fries and soda can be more than half of the calories needed all day.

The Otsego County Department of Health offers these tips to cut calories, fat and cholesterol:

- Look for restaurants that offer choices of smaller portions, have locally grown products on their menu and post nutrition information on their menu and on-line.
- When choosing items, be aware of calorie- and fat-packed salad dressings, spreads, cheese, sour cream etc. For example, ask for a grilled chicken sandwich without the mayonnaise.
- Breaded, batter-dipped and tempura all mean fried food, which is heavy in fat. Look instead for lower fat, grilled, broiled and flame-cooked. Other good choices include entrées that are steamed, poached, roasted or baked in their own juices.
- Order a baked, boiled or roasted potato instead of fries. Ask the server to leave off the butter and sour cream.
- When choosing from a salad bar, avoid items like grated cheese, prepared salads, cream dressings, chopped eggs, bacon bits and croutons.
- Don't be afraid to special order. Ask for olive oil and vinegar for your salads or order the dressing “on the side” and spoon only a small amount on at a time.
- Watch portion size. At some restaurants a single serving provides enough for two meals. Choose a smaller portion size, order a side salad instead of fries and don't supersize anything.

Many restaurant foods may be prepared with trans fats. They include baked goods, fried foods and margarine. Trans fat is similar to saturated fat in meat and dairy fat and increases the risk of heart disease by raising total cholesterol.

Check the menu and ask your server about trans fat and saturated fat before ordering. Avoiding trans fat and saturated fat is part of a heart-healthy diet, which also includes eating more vegetables and fruit and choosing low-fat and non-fat milk and dairy products.

To learn more about obesity and healthy nutrition, visit the State Health Department web site at <http://www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/nutrition>.

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