

9 tips to help kids make healthful dining choices

Dining out with your child? With so many menu options, it can be overwhelming to choose the best one for your child.

Here are a few tips to help you navigate the menu from Joy Dubost, the National Restaurant Association's nutrition and food and healthy living director:

- Choose a grilled chicken sandwich or a small hamburger. The burger provides a substantial amount of protein. Request a whole wheat bun if the restaurant offers them. That counts as a serving of whole grain. Don't forget to top the burger with lettuce, tomato or other vegetables.
- Look for grilled, broiled or baked options to reduce caloric and fat intake.
- Consider a baked potato, whole-grain pasta or fruit, such as apple slices instead of fried options. Those options typically are lower in calories and count as fruit, vegetable or grain servings.
- Choose steamed, grilled or raw vegetables as side dishes. You might want to encourage your child to dip vegetables in low-fat dressing. Many children are more likely to try veggies when they have such options.
- Limit sauces or condiments that can add calories and fat.
- When ordering beverages, choose water, reduced-fat milk (1 percent or skim preferably), or 100 percent juice, which counts as a serving of fruit.
- For dessert, consider fruit cups, yogurt parfaits, kid-sized ice cream cones, sherbet or sorbet. Be mindful of portion sizes.
- Don't limit your child to the children's menu. Consider splitting a healthful entrée or appetizer with your child.
- Don't forget to include physical activity into your child's lifestyle. Encourage your child to be active at least 60 minutes a day.

All foods can fit into an active, healthy lifestyle. Eating out should be fun, so it can be OK to occasionally allow your child a treat. Just be sure to balance their meals with healthful menu options.