



No Reservations

How to Take the Worry Out of Eating Out

Whether it's lunch on the go at McDonald's® or a candle-lit celebration at a romantic bistro, there's no doubt that eating out is an important part of American social life.

But if you have IBD, that five-course gourmet dinner may look like an obstacle course. Will the salad make

you sick? Is a harmful ingredient lurking in that sauce? Does every dessert on the menu have to contain nuts?

But eating out doesn't have to be a daunting experience. While a restaurant can pose challenges that you won't encounter in your own kitchen, those challenges aren't insurmountable. All it takes to enjoy a meal out is a little planning and a little patience. And the rewards—enjoying a relaxing meal in good company—are well worth the effort. Here are some tips that can make dining out a joy instead of a drag.

- **Don't go into it feeling starved.** During the day, eat a light, nutritious meal of foods you know you can tolerate before going out to dinner. This will take the edge off your hunger and help prevent you from overindulging or being tempted by foods that you don't tolerate well or are uncertain about.
- **Don't be afraid to make special requests.** Many restaurants will accommodate changes to how a dish is prepared. Our culture has become increasingly tolerant of any number of special diets, such as Atkins, South Beach,

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and all the different varieties of vegetarianism. Chances are good that yours is not the only special request they've gotten that day, and that they'll be more than willing to try to please you.

- **Call ahead.** If you have specific questions about menu choices, you may want to call ahead to get them answered. And, if you can get a look at the menu before you go, as you often can on the Internet, you can even plan your meal ahead of time. There are better and worse choices on every menu, and discerning potential problem foods may be easier at home than in a restaurant with a hurried server bearing down on you.

- **Eat smaller portions.** Appetizer and half-size portions are a good option. You'll waste less food and money should you decide you've made a mistake when the food comes, and can always order more should you want to.

- **Indulge your junk food craving... but in moderation.** Plan your diet around foods that nourish your body well. Use small amounts of fast food and "junk food"—high-calorie snacks that are low in nutrients (like potato chips)—to add variety and fun to your diet. Try to stay away from "super-size" portions that may make you unwell. Be selective: Mix lower-fat items (like a grilled chicken sandwich) with small portions of higher-fat foods, like fries.

As we all know, there's no "IBD-safe" menu out there because everyone's tolerance for different foods varies. Only you know what's likely to be safe and nourishing for you. Take the time to try to plan your meals out, using what you know about what works for you, and the world can be your oyster... or at least a grilled chicken sandwich with a small order of fries. ■

Bon appétit!