



Happier Meals for Kids at the Drive-Thru

Contributors: Elizabeth M. Ward, MS, RD and Esther Ellis, MS, RDN, LDN

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You've got hungry kids in the car and you need food pronto, so you pull into the drive-thru at a fast food restaurant. We've all been there ... but, hopefully, not too often. A 2013 study in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that teenagers and younger children who eat fast food consume more calories than from meals prepared at home. In addition to excess calories, a steady intake of fast food may result in large amounts of saturated fat, added sugars and sodium and fall short on dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Fast food meals for kids may have gotten more nutritious, with fruits and vegetables becoming common side dish options. But many quick-serve food establishments remain a minefield of less-

than-desirable choices. While parents don't need to enforce a complete ban on fast food, make sure to choose the most nutrient-rich options in kid-appropriate portions.

Set Limits

The wafting smells of French fries or fresh doughnuts can play havoc on your resolve to order smart, so **be clear about your rules for fast food before ordering.**  For example, let your kids know you want them to sip milk instead of soda or have a fruit or vegetable with their meal.

Arm Yourself with Information

Many quick-serve establishments list nutritional content directly on their menu boards. Another place to check is online, so you can take a few minutes to study the best choices at a variety of fast food joints before you hit the road. When you don't have the time to check facts, keep these lighter choices in mind and ask for sauces, dressings, and condiments on the side:

- Salad with grilled chicken
- Grilled chicken wrap or fresh turkey wrap
- Plain, kid-sized hamburger
- Low-fat yogurt
- Apple slices
- Bean burritos or tacos
- Chili
- Large fruit cups
- Small roast beef sandwich
- Fat-free or low-fat milk

Mind the Portions

Order appropriate child-size meals for youngsters and resist supersizing meals for older kids, unless two or more children are splitting it. Adults also can order kid-sized meals, which automatically come with fruit and low-fat milk at some restaurants and supply about half the calories of some of the regular menu items.

Rethink Your Drink

Milk and water are appropriate options for younger children. Teenagers, who may be able to have more calories because they are active, might request regular soda or blended coffee beverages that are loaded with added sugars. These choices may displace more nutritious calories from milk or other foods. Instead, steer them toward the smallest size possible or have them split a larger size.

Plan for Healthful Snacking

Planning for hunger can help you avoid the pull of the drive-thru. Keep tasty and nutritious foods in the car, including dried fruit, natural applesauce in single-serve containers and nuts. On longer trips, take ice packs in a small cooler or refrigerator bag and stock it with fresh fruit, string

cheese, low-fat yogurt, milk boxes, whole-grain crackers, nut butters or hummus and fresh veggies to tide you over or to supplement a fast food meal.

Elizabeth M. Ward, MS, RD is an author, nutrition consultant and former spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.