



READ TIME:
3 1/2 MINUTES

March is good nutrition month; **YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT!**

By Lydia Schillinger

Good nutrition is essential. It plays an important part in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. What we eat has a huge impact on our overall health. Unhealthy eating habits lead to chronic diseases like osteoporosis, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer. Our dietary habits play an important role to help keep us functioning and fit.

Cooking at home is a great way to know your ingredients and control your calories. I love to cook but you may not be as enthusiastic about it as I am. If you are not a great cook or are short on time, you may still eat great food. I especially love steamable vegetable bags. My kids can even make them! If you need a break from cooking at home, there are times when going out to eat is a real treat and should be enjoyed from time to time. When a person goes out to eat, how can we be sure what we are consuming? I read somewhere that Americans eat and drink about one-third of their calories away from home. That can be a lot of unknowns. I like to know what I am putting in my body so when I eat out, I have some helpful tools from [choose my plate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) for you to consider using. I will highlight my favorite tips, visit the site for all 10!

Consider your drink

Choose water or other drinks without sugar. I remember hearing on the TODAY show once from a financial guru they were highlighting that if you forgo the beverages when eating out and just stick to water you can save around \$250 each year!

Order a salad

Start your meal off with veggies! Ask for the dressing on the side (always) and dip your fork in the dressing before you gather your bite of salad. This way you get a tasty bite each time with less calories from the dressing. Vinaigrettes are best!

Only eat half of your entrée

My plate.gov site calls this "Quit the 'clean your plate' club". Portion sizes these days can feed an army. You do not have to finish your meal like your Grand-Mother always told you to do. Take half of your meal home and eat it the next day or share a meal at the restaurant. You will save calories and money.

Read the labels

Most restaurants these days have calories labeled on the menu. If they don't look them up online. The 800-calorie meal sure sounds yummy but try the 400-calorie meal instead. Some menus even have lighter fare options.

Another great tip I use is to ask the Chef to prepare the meal your way. If you are eating breakfast at a diner, ask them to not use oils or butter when preparing your eggs. If you are eating at a fancy restaurant, tell the chef exactly how you want your meal prepared. I always receive a yes when requesting such accommodations. Chefs are professionals, they want you to love their food, they want you to come back and enjoy another meal.

Now that you have all these great tips on making healthy choices, I hope you will enjoy many great meals and feel great about your choices!

Visit [USDA Nutrition.gov](http://USDA.Nutrition.gov) for more information on a healthy eating lifestyle, physical activity and food safety.

If you want to change you have to change.

Let us know your progress and/or a healthy lifestyle nutrition change that was a success for you and we may feature you in one of our Wellness Newsletters. ■