

Enjoying a Healthy Night Out

DiETING DOESN'T MEAN FORFEITING THE RIGHT TO DINE OUT.

BY LAUREN GLENDENNING
THE CONNECTION

Many diet plans offer up ways to lose weight fast before transitioning into a permanent lifestyle change, but unless the change excludes going out to dinner forever, diners have to take control of what they order in restaurants if they want to avoid gaining weight. Requesting specific alterations to menu items

More

An Online tool for choosing healthy menu items can be found at <http://foodfit.com/centers/nra/dineoutsmart.asp> For more information on the National Restaurant Association's "AskUs!" program, visit <http://www.restaurant.org>

isn't forbidden, according to some local restaurant chefs and owners. But don't expect the restaurants to be the first ones offering up healthier alternatives to their menus.

"You tend to give up a little bit of control when you're not at home," said David Grotto, nutritionist and national spokesman for the American Dietetic Association. "You need to play detective."

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PHOTO BY LAUREN GLENDENNING/THE CONNECTION

A grilled portabella mushroom appetizer, topped with a balsamic vinegar reduction and sun-dried tomatoes is one of many healthy menu items at Vespucci.

Diners 'Play Detective' To Eat Healthy

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ery once in a while won't hurt the waistline. Portion control is usually up to the diner though, said Grotto, since restaurants often face criticism from consumers when they begin to scale back the sizes of menu items. A popular trick, he said, is to ask the server to wrap up half of the dish before it even hits the table. This will reduce the temptation of finishing the entire plate, since most people aren't likely to unwrap the doggie bag if they're still hungry, said Grotto.

Large portions sometimes give Italian cuisine a bad name, said Ray Farnood, owner of Vespucci, an Italian fine-dining restaurant in Fairfax. He said because of the heaping bowls of pasta served in so many Italian-American restaurants, people end up thinking that is what Italian food is all about.

"Italian food is not about pasta," said Farnood. "It's about good meat, fresh fish and a lot of vegetables."

Grotto said people do tend to stereotype certain cuisines as either decadent or healthy, when all of them can be both. He said to order beans that haven't been refried or mixed with fattening sauces when dining at a Mexican restaurant.



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Chef Emilio Sadaghiani, of Vespucci, prepares dinners using extra virgin olive oil. The restaurant boasts that it uses the oil in all of its cooking, except for a limited amount of fried items on the menu.

While French food is usually viewed as rich and fattening, "they have their portions correct," said Grotto. And when eating Italian, order the fish instead of the Penne Alla Vodka.

The Food and Drug Administration funded a report on the obesity fight, released last month by the Keystone Center, an education and public research non-profit in Colorado. The report on "away-from-

home-foods," recommends more availability of lower calorie products, menu items and meals, in addition to providing consumers with better nutrition information. It also correlates the more than 65 percent of overweight Americans to an increase in dining out in America's 900,000 restaurants over the past decade. The report states that Americans spend nearly half of their food budget on foods prepared away from home.

Farnood and Emilio Sadaghiani, executive chef at Vespucci, said they only use the best quality ingredients in their restaurant, which results in healthier meals. Vespucci uses extra virgin olive oil in its cooking, because Farnood said it is the healthiest alternative. As for pasta, they offer a section dedicated to the popular dish on their menu, but do not include it as a side with every dish. La Dolce Vita, an Italian restaurant just up the street from Vespucci, does include pasta as an accompaniment to most of its dishes, but happily substitutes vegetables or other items per customers' requests, said Ricardo Bellucci, owner. Both restaurant owners agree that the fresh fish dishes on their menus are the healthiest way to go.

"It is so important to be health conscious," said Farnood.