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Kidney Friendly FAST FOOD ORDERING TIPS

Quick-service restaurants provide us with a quick, easy, inexpensive bite when we're pressed for time. Americans love fast food and there are so many items to choose from! A lot of chains are now offering lower-fat options and if chosen wisely, fast foods can be healthy AND fit into your renal diet. If you are a regular through the drive-up window or frequently dine in at fast food restaurants, keep these tips in mind:

1 Burgers and sandwiches are high in sodium because they are pre-salted. It may be difficult for the quick-service restaurant to omit the salt. Be sure to ask before you order.

2 Remember that fries and baked potatoes are rich in potassium. If you can't imagine a burger without the fries, order a small serving and ask for unsalted where it is possible.

3 Ketchup, mustard and pickles are all high in sodium. Keep condiments, special sauces and dressings to a minimum. Request these toppings to be served "on the side" so you can control the amount.

4 Beverage sizes typically are large or "super-size" and can contribute to fluid overload if the entire beverage is consumed. Order a small beverage and ask for extra ice so it lasts longer and you don't drink it as fast.

5 Balance fast food items with other food choices. As you order, consider the other foods you have eaten or will eat during the day.

6 Choose broiled, steamed or grilled items over deep fried foods. To trim the fat from fried items, order the regular variety instead of the "extra crispy" and remove the skin before eating. Removing the skin also lowers the sodium content since most batters and coatings usually include seasonings rich in sodium.

7 Get a breakdown of fat, calories and other nutrition information (potassium, phosphorus or sodium) from the store manager. You can also check out the restaurant's web site for a complete nutritional analysis of all their menu items. Please note that obtaining information on potassium and phosphorus can be difficult.

8 Generally speaking, choose meals under 500 calories with less than 30% of the calories from fat. Many items are loaded with sodium so limit your sodium intake for the rest of the day. Watch your fluid intake because these foods will make you more thirsty than usual. Some items may require an increased dose of phosphate binders.

9 Note the serving size and work with your renal dietitian to safely add these menu items into your eating plan.

10 Look for places where you control your own ingredients like Chipotle, Subway or where you can build your own pizza.

11 Plan ahead so you are not famished when you visit a fast food restaurant. Before you leave the house, eat a healthy snack or take one with you. And be sure to take your phosphorus binders with you if they are prescribed to you.

