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Fast Food

How To Lift The Guise On Healthier Choices

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By changing menus and methods of cooking, fast-food restaurants are making it easier for you to eat more healthfully. But don't be fooled by products that sound healthy. Here are our suggestions for how you truly can trim calories and fat:

- Be salad savvy -- Avoid the mistake of thinking "salad" is synonymous with "diet

food." Salads can be sneaky about fat and calories. The taco salads offered at Wend's and Jack In The Box each deliver 500-plus calories, more than half of which come from fat. The meat and cheese in chef salads invariably overpower the vegetables to increase fat. Chicken and seafood salads usually are lower in fat and calories, averaging less than 200 calories.

It's the dressings that provide the crowning touch. They can add as much as 400 calories to any salad. Watch out for packaged dressings that contain more than one serving.

The calories and other nutrients are given for a one-half ounce serving, yet some packages hold up to 2.5 ounces. Ask for reduced or low-calorie salad dressing.

■ Choose chicken carefully -- Chicken may be naturally lower in fat than hamburger, but when breaded and fried, it loses its nutritional edge. At 688 calories and 40 grams of fat, Burger King's Chicken Specialty has 100 more calories and 20 percent more fat than McDonald's Big Mac. Chicken chunks, strips and "stix" have fewer calories than chicken sandwiches, but still carry a heavy load of fat.

The leanest chicken sandwich we found is Jack In The Box Chicken Fajita Pita for 292 calories and 8 grams of fat -- if you skip the guacamole.

■ Be suspicious of specialty sandwiches -- Even non-fried sandwiches made with lean turkey or ham can be deceiving. Hardee's Turkey Club packs more calories and as much fat as McDonald's Quarter Pounder. General clues to keep in mind when deciding about this type of sandwich are its size and the amount of cheese, mayonnaise or special sauces.

■ Order burgers plain and non-imposing -- You know you're headed for calories and fat if you order a burger billed "jumbo," "ultimate," "double" or "deluxe." You may have to search the menu board a bit, but all major franchises offer a plain hamburger for under 300 calories. At Hardee's and Roy Rogers, the roast beef sandwich is one of the leanest items you can order.

■ Don't read too much into the hype about healthier fat -- Switching from animal to vegetable fats is one step to lowered dietary cholesterol and saturated fat. But it doesn't transform fried foods into healthy options. Large orders of McDonald's french fries (cooked in an animal/vegetable blend) and Hardee's french fries (cooked

in vegetable oil) have about 20 grams of total fat. Hardee's fries have no cholesterol and a bit less saturated fat. But the key to your heart health is trimming total fat, and all fried fast foods still fail to do that.

■ You make the call -- Fast food has come a long way since the days of only burgers, fries and shakes. More food options can make it easier for you to elude excess fat and calories for speed and convenience. Nevertheless, it all comes down to what you say when the person at the counter asks, "May I take your order?"

Here are the leanest and fattest fast foods you can eat

We* reviewed products offered at six popular fast-food franchises. In terms of fat and calories, here are the best and worst choices you can make:

Best Picks	Calories	Fat (grams)
Burger King Chicken Tenders (6 pieces)	204	10
Hardee's Chicken Stix (6 pieces)	234	10
Jack In the Box Chicken Fajita Pita	292	8
McDonald's Hamburger	257	10
Roy Rogers Roast Beef Sandwich	317	10
Wendy's Plain Single	350	16

Worst Picks	Calories	Fat (grams)
Burger King Whopper with Cheese	711	43
Hardee's Bacon Cheeseburger	556	33
Jack in the Box Ultimate Cheeseburger	942	69
McDonald's McD.L.T.	674	42
Roy Rogers Bar Burger	611	39
Wendy's Bacon Swiss Burger	710	44

Note: Calories and fat are based on the most recent printed information provided to us by each company.