

RESTAURANT GUIDE

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

While it's best to cook our own food and to eat out as little as possible, most of us will eat out sometimes. Therefore, it's good to have some "go to" ideas of what to choose, even if the ingredients aren't "perfect".

Below are some featured restaurants along with a few example meals **that I might choose**. Nutrition information listed is not exact; these numbers simply provide a "ballpark" range, to see if your selected item(s) are reasonable or "out of the park!". Sometimes I make the healthiest and lowest carb choice possible; other times I might treat myself to something a little higher in calories and carbs.

Click on the [links](#) to **menus** and **nutrition calculators** below to look up specific restaurants and find items that appeal to you. Create your own list on the final page.

| RESTAURANT AND FOOD ITEM | Calories | Fat (grams) | Carbs (grams) | Protein (grams) |
|--|----------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Applebee's - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Salads can seem like the healthiest choice; however, the calories can be significant, especially with the dressings. Use the guide above to check out your favorite; compare to my choice below.</i> | | | | |
| Strawberry Balsamic Chicken Salad, no breadstick, with/without Lemon Vinaigrette dressing | 680/380 | 43/11 | 31/28 | 47 |
| 8-oz Sirloin w/steamed broccoli & garlic green beans | 540 | 32 | 16 | 41 |
| Buffalo Wild Wings - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Traditional wings (not boneless) + dry rubs are a really good low-carb option.</i> | | | | |
| Buffalo Blue Burger (no bun) and without sides | 660 | 54 | 1 | 41 |
| 10 Traditional Wings (½ dry rub & ½ Nashville Hot) + celery | 750 | 43 | 2 | 88 |
| Naked Tenders (5) + Nashville hot sauce + side salad (no dressing) | 400 | 12 | 11 | 67 |
| Chick-Fil-A - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Wraps can seem like a healthy option but the calories and carbs can be more than desirable. The Cool Wrap has 660 calories, 45 g fat, 32 g carb, 43 g protein. If you just eat half, that's comparable to the salads below.</i> | | | | |
| Spicy Southwest Salad without the creamy salsa dressing or tortilla strips but including the chili lime pepitas (add your own dressing and adjust calories and macros) | 330 | 14 | 19 | 31 |
| Market Salad without granola or apple cider vinaigrette but including the roasted almonds (add your own dressing) | 240 | 10 | 15 | 27 |
| Chicken Salad Chick - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Many good options here; the biggest problem is the soybean oil in the mayo.</i> | | | | |
| Classic Salad topped with Classic Carol Chicken Salad | 430 | 35 | 9 | 19 |
| Lemon Basil Chicken Salad + a cup of Tomato Bisque Soup | 500 | 41 | 14 | 17 |

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| Chilis - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>"Guiltless Grill" items are all less than 650 calories but may have lots of carbs. Use the nutrition guide above to check your favorites. Swap out the rice to save lots of carbs and calories. Some of the salads are high too!</i> | | | | |
| Guiltless Grill - Sirloin (6 oz/10 oz) with avocado + asparagus | 340/490 | 16/24 | 13/13 | 38/59 |
| Guiltless Grill - Ancho Salmon with broccoli + asparagus (not rice) | 500 | 26 | 18 | 47 |
| Grilled Chicken Salad with Honey Lime Vinaigrette included | 440 | 24 | 8 | 3 |
| Cracker Barrel - Menu (visual), Menu (without pictures) and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Breakfast options usually include "All the Fixins" (carbs + fat). The "Good Morning Breakfast" with egg whites has less fat and calories, but is still high in carbs. I might get that, but I would prefer to just order a side plate of scrambled eggs + sausage. It's pricey but fits my meal plan. There are many lunch/dinner options using a formula of protein + veggies + a little fat; some options are much higher in calories though, so beware.</i> | | | | |
| Catfish or Trout + turnip greens and pinto beans | 500/570 | 17/20 | 29/33 | 58/63 |
| Sirloin or Hamburger Steak + broccoli and green beans | 450/540 | 20/34 | 14 | 51/38 |
| Five Guys - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>The regular-sized burgers have 2 patties, which drives the calories up. Getting a "little" version cuts the calories for a lighter meal. The bun has 240 calories, 9 g fat, 39 g carbs that you can eliminate by ditching it. They are known for their milkshakes. A fair warning: the base of the milkshake is 870 calories. And a small fry has 526 calories. Yikes!</i> | | | | |
| Little Bacon Cheeseburger (no bun) + lettuce, tomato, grilled onions | 475 | 30 | 14 | 39 |
| Cheeseburger (no bun) + lettuce, tomato, green pepper, grilled onions | 770 | 46 | 16 | 64 |
| Hardee's - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Hardee's has many options for a lower-carb meal plan. Here are 10 options from KetoASAP. Many of these items would work well for a quick, easy lunch!!</i> | | | | |
| Mushroom and Swiss Thickburger, no bun ("make it low carb") | 420 | 32 | 5 | 24 |
| Charbroiled Chicken Club Sandwich, no bun ("make it low carb") | 390 | 27 | 7 | 29 |
| Mellow Mushroom Pizza - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Some pizza places offer cauliflower crust for the pizza; that could be a good option. This restaurant offers gluten-free crust, but it will still have lots of carbs. Carbs + fat is a bad combination. In this case, a salad is the best bet or a burger without the bun.</i> | | | | |
| Elevated Cobb Salad without dressing (Springer Mountain Farms chicken, applewood-smoked bacon, fresh avocados, crumbled bleu cheese & sliced Roma tomatoes on a bed of chopped romaine lettuce) | 730 | 41 | 19 | 54 |
| Elevated Cobb Salad without dressing, "Lil" size, no dressing | 340 | 19 | 9 | 26 |
| Ritz Burger - without bun, garlic butter or garlic aioli; includes burger, Swiss cheese, caramelized onions, pickle and lettuce | 740 | 57 | 11 | 49 |

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| Moe's Southwest Grill - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Protein + veggies is the formula to stick to, plus some healthy fats. Plenty of options for this! It's ok to add some beans too. These do provide carbs but they are high in nutrition value and also have fiber. Skip the rice and quinoa though, unless you lead a really active life.</i> | | | | |
| Bowl: fish, black beans, pico de gallo, guacamole, sour cream, cilantro, shredded lettuce (net carbs calculated, mostly from fiber in beans) | 378 | 22 | 21 net | 52 |
| Salad: chopped Romaine, Adobo chicken, pinto beans, shredded cheese, pico de gallo (net carbs calculated, mostly from fiber in beans) | 422 | 20 | 19 net | 38 |
| O'Charley's - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| Cedar Plank Salmon + broccoli and asparagus | 640 | 41 | 11 | 55 |
| Louisiana Sirloin + house side salad (no dressing) + asparagus | 810 | 50 | 22 net | 57 |
| Olive Garden - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>All meals come with salad. Avoid the croutons to keep it lower in carbs and calories.</i> | | | | |
| Herb-Grilled Salmon (with parmesan garlic broccoli) | 460 | 29 | 8 | 45 |
| Grilled Chicken Margherita (with parmesan garlic broccoli) | 540 | 27 | 14 | 65 |
| Panera Bread- Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>This is the place to go for salads! Check out the options here. Be careful, some salads are high in carbs. Also, all salad dressings contain soybean oil; the sauces contain soybean and canola oil; minimize these. The souffles for breakfast are high in fat + carbs; the best choice is a wrap (less calories, still has carbs + fat).</i> | | | | |
| Green Goddess Cobb Salad with Chicken (without dressing) | 410 | 21 | 16 net | 37 |
| Green Goddess Cobb Salad with Chicken (dressing included) | 500 | 30 | 17 net | 37 |
| Chicken Caesar Salad, Double Chicken, no croutons | 480 | 25 | 10 | 47 |
| Subway - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Protein Bowls are a great option! Salads are good too, especially if you skip/add your own dressing.</i> | | | | |
| Turkey "Cali Fresh" Bowl | 470 | 29 | 8 net | 41 |
| Steak "Cali Fresh" Salad (no dressing) | 360 | 22 | 9 net | 28 |
| Wendy's - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>Wendy's has several great salad options, so there's no reason to get anything else, except for maybe the chili! Note that the Jalapeno Popper salad comes with breaded chicken (34 grams carbs). Get grilled chicken instead!</i> | | | | |
| Parmesan Caesar Salad (without dressing; add your own) | 300 | 14 | 5 | 41 |
| Southwest Avocado Salad (without dressing; add your own) | 420 | 25 | 12 | 39 |
| Chili (small/large); dress it up with cheese or diced avocado | 240/340 | 11/15 | 22/31 | 16/22 |

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| Zaxby's - Menu and Nutrition Guide | | | | |
| <i>The "Zalads" are a good option if you get the chicken grilled (not fried). Subtract the Texas Toast and save 150 calories, 7 g fat, 19 g carb, 3 g protein. The traditional wings are a low-carb item but high in fat. Get a 5-piece order of chicken tenders or wings to share with others; just have one "for the taste of it".</i> | | | | |
| Blackened Blue Zalad, no dressing added | 530 | 24 | 34 | 47 |
| Blackened Blue Zalad, no dressing, no Texas toast | 380 | 14 | 15 | 44 |
| Blackened Blue Zalad, no dressing, no Texas toast, no fried onions <small>This is how I get mine and its GREAT this way! I sometimes eat ½ of a chicken finger from someone else's order "for the taste of it".</small> | 345 | 11 | 11 | 44 |
| Chicken finger (per each one) - no sauce | 100 | 4.5 | 4 | 10 |
| Traditional wings (per each one) - no sauce | 80 | 5 | 1 | 8 |

Many of the items I chose above are higher in calories, carbs and/or fats than I would usually consume, especially compared to meals cooked at home. This is why I don't eat out that frequently. Calories add up and create weight gain over time if you aren't mindful of it. I usually eat 2 meals/day with minimal snacking; this is another reason why I might "get away with" higher-calorie meals sometimes; it's easier to balance a higher-calorie meal with one lower-calorie meal (and no snacks) vs eating 3 meals per day that also include some higher-calorie items. And if you do much snacking in addition to this, calorie management becomes a nightmare!

Julie's Other General Tips:

These are the guidelines that I personally follow 95% of the time. See if they will suit you too!

- ❖ Avoid the fries, tortillas and tortilla chips, bread, breadsticks, biscuits, and rolls. I only eat the bread if it's REALLY worth it! These are all processed foods with extra calories and little nutrition value. Imagine putting on a swimsuit after the meal and these items won't look so enticing!
- ❖ Ask if it's real butter vs margarine; same goes for oil - ask if it's really olive oil or something else. Otherwise, assume that it is made from soybean oil and minimize it.
- ❖ For sandwiches, replace the bread with a lettuce wrap. The inside of the sandwich is where the nutrition is!
- ❖ Watch out for condiments and special sauces (soybean or canola oil). Mustard is good.
- ❖ Salad dressings will usually be made with unhealthy soybean or vegetable oils. If you are taking the salad with you, use your own dressing, if possible. For a taco salad, use salsa for your dressing.
- ❖ Look out for candied nuts and dried fruit on your salad; these add lots of calories and carbs.
- ❖ Omelets and egg dishes at restaurants are often 800-1000 calories with lots of hidden carbs. Look up the nutrition facts before ordering; you might do better with eggs + breakfast meat and a side of veggies.
- ❖ Get water to drink! It's free and has no sugar or unfavorable ingredients.

Here are some excellent tips based on the type of restaurant/cuisine: [The Healthiest Meals to Order at Every Type of Restaurant](#). I agree with these tips! And [here is a guide for Chinese restaurants](#).

For a snapshot of what **NOT** to get: [50 Most Caloric Dishes in America](#). Scroll through and make sure these aren't the meals you are ordering! It's a deadly combination of **CARBS + FAT**.

