



fast food travel

BY MOLLY KIMBALL, R.D.

With summer vacations and road trips underway, people will be resorting to fast food more often than usual. Here's some better alternatives to traditional grab-n-go fast food nightmares, as well as a heads up on several menu items cleverly disguised as "healthier" foods that you will want to steer clear of.

mcdonald's

At the Golden Arches, you have a range of menu options containing 300 calories or less, and are relatively low in added sugars and fat. Pick one of these: single hamburger, cheeseburger, grilled chicken snack wrap, snack-size fruit and walnut salad, bacon ranch salad or Caesar salad (both with grilled chicken and Newman's Own Low Fat Balsamic vinaigrette), or an Egg McMuffin.

Kids (and adults!), can now request a Happy Meal with apple dippers (35 calories) with low-fat caramel sauce (70 calories) in place of French fries. And they can opt for 1% milk instead of a soft drink.

By the end of this year, McDonalds is working toward all menu items containing zero grams of trans fats per serving.

wendy's

The junior hamburger, junior cheeseburger, chicken grill sandwich, and grilled chicken go-wrap all fall in the range of 230-320 calories. Even better is the fact that you can bypass the side of fries, and order a side salad or mandarin orange cup, for under 100 calories. Be diligent when ordering a salad, though. Even without the dressing, most of their salads clock in with nearly 400 calories. Your best salad bet is the grilled chicken Caesar with one of their lighter dressings, not Caesar dressing.

burger king

Order a Whopper Junior without mayonnaise, or a hamburger, cheeseburger, Tendergrill chicken sandwich, or Tendergrill chicken salad with light or fat free dressing, and you'll just get 290-400 calories. If you're watching your sugar intake, don't be fooled by the strawberry flavored apple sauce – it's still high in added sugars and low in fiber.

taco bell

Taco Bell has the most protein-based entrée options for under 200 calories: crunchy taco, beef soft taco, chicken soft taco, cheese roll-up, and pintos 'n cheese. Order "fresco style" and save another 20-100 calories, depending on the item. Use caution when ordering healthy, though, as Taco Bell's salads are some of their highest calorie menu items. The 840-calorie Fiesta Taco Salad ranks the worst on the menu, surpassing even the Mexican Pizza and Nachos BellGrande.



sub shops

Often viewed as the best of the fast food, Subway is one of those places you have to be careful not to assume it's healthy, simply because it's "Subway." Ditto for Quiznos. The regular-sized six-inch Subway sandwiches can easily add up to 700-plus calories, depending on your choice of condiments.

Your best calorie-bet is the Subway mini (in actuality, it's not mini, as it's still four inches). The ham, turkey, or roast beef are all under 200 calories. If you double the meat to add more protein, you'll still be under the 300-calorie mark. Subway's salads with light dressings can be excellent options, all under 300 calories.

Even from the "Watching Calories" page of their website, Quiznos subs and salads are closer to 400-500 calories. Instead, order a Quiznos "Sammie" to keep your intake closer to 300-325 calories.

convenience store

Time's tight, you're on a strict travel schedule. You don't even want to take the time to stop at a fast food joint, so you dash into the gas station's convenience store.

The choices can be overwhelming, but keep it simple: a protein bar (my favorite is the South Beach Diet meal bars), beef jerky, or nuts (look for one-ounce packets, rather than the 400+ calorie three-ounce tubes). A turkey sandwich isn't a bad bet, either. Sure, it may come in a triangle box on some soggy bread,

but it still beats nibbling your way through a full-size bag of baked chips while the scenery passes you by.

Important note: Beware of pseudo-healthy snacks like pretzels, crackers, and cereal bars. The rush of blood sugar, followed by the inevitable crash, can leave you practically dosing off on your journey to paradise.

have food, will travel

Fed up with fast food's limited options? Don't want to pay the price of convenience store snacks? Consider becoming your own traveling grocery store. Bring an ice chest packed with turkey, light mayonnaise, string cheese, low-sugar yogurt, cottage cheese, and fruit. Pack a tote containing non-perishables such as whole grain bread, whole grain crackers, peanut butter, beef jerky, and nutrition bars. Add a package of plastic utensils and decorative paper plates and napkins. You'll be enjoying healthy vacation dining in style while saving your dining-out money on that vacation souvenir that wants to come home with you. **HFM**