

Check, Please

Many single entrées at U.S. chain restaurants serve up masses of calories, fat, and sodium. **Just how bad is a full meal?**

Most Americans eat out at least once a week, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. So they might be dismayed to learn that 96 percent of the entrées from more than 200 chain restaurants contain more calories, fat, and sodium than should be consumed in one sitting. (This finding applies to any adult who eats three roughly nutritionally equivalent meals a day and hopes to stay within U.S. dietary guidelines for a daily 2,000-calorie diet.) Equally distressing? The fact that items consumed before and after entrées—such as specialty drinks, appetizers, sides, and desserts—substantially increase the counts. Using the average nutritional values calculated by RAND researchers for each item type, our fictional four-course meal illustrates just how easy it is to consume many times more nutrients than most of us need.

SOURCE: "What's on the Menu? A Review of the Energy and Nutritional Content of US Chain Restaurant Menus," *Public Health Nutrition*, published online, May 2012, Helen W. Wu, Roland Sturm.

Our four-course meal overshoots the target for one adult meal **many times over**

4x
the
Calories

5x
the
Total Fat

6x
the
Sodium

7x
the
Saturated
Fat

Nutrition Facts

	Our Four-Course Meal	Per-Meal Target	Our Meal as a % of Target
Calories	2,594	667	389%
Total Fat	125g	26g	481%
Sat.	50g	7g	714%
Trans	1g	—	—
Sodium	4,587mg	767mg	598%
Total Carb.	274g	43g	637%
Protein	93g	15g–19g	489%–620%

NOTE: The per-meal target is based on U.S. dietary guidelines for a 2,000-calorie-per-day adult diet, divided by three (see U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*, 7th ed., Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010).

Hi, folks, I'm Joe, and I'll be your server today! Can I start you off with something refreshing to drink, like our triple-berry-blast smoothie?



Average Specialty Nonalcoholic Beverage	
Calories	418
Total Fat	13g
Sat.	8g
Trans	0g
Sodium	209mg
Total Carb.	69g
Protein	8g

And how about an appetizer? Maybe our loaded Southwest-style nachos with pepper jack, avocado, and sour cream?



Average Appetizer	
Calories	813
Total Fat	48g
Sat.	16g
Trans	1g
Sodium	2,023mg
Total Carb.	60g
Protein	35g

Our Mighty Big Burger with a side of fries is an excellent choice, especially if you brought your appetite!



Average Entrée with One Side	
Calories	934
Total Fat	45g
Sat.	16g
Trans	0g
Sodium	2,053mg
Total Carb.	86g
Protein	42g

Who saved room for dessert? Our apple cinnamon caramel pie with vanilla bean ice cream is out of this world!



Average Dessert	
Calories	429
Total Fat	19g
Sat.	10g
Trans	0g
Sodium	302mg
Total Carb.	59g
Protein	8g