

Dining Out with Dr. Boz

Those of us who struggle with weight can attest to the difficulties encountered being “good” when dining out. Whether it’s a fancy restaurant or a quick trip through the drive through, we seem to lose all sense of logic and control when confronted with an entire menu full of options.

It’s like our brains cease to function properly, and we end up like a drooling Homer Simpson in the presence of a dozen donuts or a case of beer.



There are a variety of reasons why this occurs. First, we’re out of our “comfort zone.” At home, we know what items are in the cupboard, fridge, or freezer. We have certain foods or meals we like to eat or prepare. There is a sense of security in knowing the top shelf of your fridge contains yogurt, blueberries, strawberries, and pepper slices without even looking. When dining out, you might have a general sense of the menu, but things always change. There might be specials, new menu items, or even just a different style of menu with pictures. It’s just a bit unsettling, which increases the chance of making a poor food choice.

Second, we often go out to eat with others. While I fully support socializing with friends and family, I also know this may lead to questionable choices being made. Oftentimes, friends and family “pressure” us into eating things we may not want. It typically isn’t done to be mean, but it happens nonetheless. I think many of us can recall situations where everyone wants to get some appetizers, wine, dessert, or something “extra” with the meal. It’s hard to say “no” in these circumstances, and you certainly would have a tough time convincing everyone NOT to order those things. As a result, you eat or drink things that may not have been part of the plan going into the meal.

Third, we may think that going out to eat means you “should” eat whatever you want. Dining out is special, even if it’s just a trip to McDonalds. It’s almost as if we have an obligation to “make the most of it” at the restaurant. For example, almost every time I eat at Pizza Hut, I feel the need to order some type of breadsticks or cheese bread. I’m going there to eat PIZZA which consists of BREAD and CHEESE, but I still order EXTRA bread and cheese because I typically don’t eat those things. Whether it’s conscious or not, dining out almost seems to encourage a mentality of forgetting the “rules” and eating recklessly.

There are plenty of other reasons dining out is so dangerous, so many that I could probably write forever discussing those issues. Because dining out seems to be an almost universal problem for people, I thought it might be interesting to take a more in-depth look at various eating establishments to “demystify” the process of dining out. Rather than tackle everything at once, I’ll be examining one eating establishment each month, exploring the nutritional data of items on the menu. My hope is this column will provide each of you with the information necessary to make better choices when dining out. Knowledge is power, and when it comes to dining out, we need all the power we can get!

This month, I’ll be taking a look at **McDonalds**. What better place to start than the quickest and most popular fast food joint around. You might think McDonalds has nothing good to offer on its menu, but you’d be wrong. I’m not saying they have a LOT of good things, but there are healthy options available. The trick is to find them on the menu and to avoid getting sucked in by “value” meals and “supersizing” items. Just because a large drink is only a few cents more than the medium doesn’t mean you HAVE to get it. But again, that’s an argument for another day. So let’s take a look at some of the “standards” on the menu:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Hamburger	250	9	3.5	520	2	6	12
Cheeseburger	300	12	6	750	2	6	15
Quarter Pounder w/Cheese	510	26	12	1190	3	9	29
Big Mac	540	29	10	1040	3	9	25
Filet-O-Fish	380	18	3.5	640	2	5	15
McChicken	360	16	3	830	2	5	14
Premium Grilled Chicken	420	10	2	1190	3	11	32

(All information obtained from <http://nutrition.mcdonalds.com/nutritionexchange/nutritionfacts.pdf>)

McDonald's bases their nutritional information ("Recommended Daily Value") on a 2,000 calorie diet, which is the standard placed on all food products. I could argue against THIS information for days, but I will try to stay on task. The nutrition information also indicates values are based on "standard product formulations and serving sizes," so whatever is typically on these sandwiches is included in the numbers.

What you will notice is one Big Mac takes up over 25% of your daily caloric intake—that's just for the sandwich, never mind all the extras you might purchase along with it. Surprisingly, the Filet-O-Fish and the McChicken, both of which are breaded and (I believe) fried have the lowest amounts of saturated (i.e., "bad") fat. The Quarter Pounder with Cheese is a gut buster, though, consisting of over 25% of your daily calories, 50% for sodium, and a whopping **61%** for saturated fat. Want to save yourself? Take a pass on the cheese. With the Quarter Pounder, you lose 100 calories, 7g fat, 5g saturated fat, and 460mg sodium. Cheese is NOT your friend when it comes to fast food. Even the Premium Grilled Chicken struggles nutritionally, mainly due to a surprisingly high level of sodium.

Next up, let's take a look at some fries and nuggets:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Small Fries	230	11	1.5	160	3	0	3
Medium Fries	380	19	2.5	270	5	0	4
Large Fries	500	25	3.5	350	6	0	6
6pc. Chicken Nuggets	280	17	3	600	0	0	14
10pc. Chicken Nuggets	460	29	5	1000	0	0	24
5pc. Premium Chicken Selects	660	40	6	1680	0	0	38
Ketchup Packet	15	0	0	110	0	0	0
BBQ Sauce	50	0	0	260	0	10	0
Creamy Ranch Sauce	170	18	3	270	0	1	0
Spicy Buffalo Sauce	60	6	1	800	1	0	0

Wow. Those are some pretty scary numbers. First, let's look at the positives. McDonalds apparently uses healthy oils, because the saturated fat is fairly well managed. Also, chicken is protein, and protein helps regulate and repair the body. On the flip side, that's a lot of calories going on! Again, the Large Fries are equivalent to 25% of the recommended daily calorie intake. That means a Big Mac and Large Fries gets you over 1,000 calories in a meal. And apparently "Premium" means "more calories and salt." 70% of the daily value in SALT??? That doesn't even include dipping sauces (Spicy Buffalo at 800mg of sodium!). The moral here is if you want fries or nuggets, definitely opt for the smallest size possible, with no sauces or ketchup.

So, what about those healthy salads offered on the menu? Here's what we find:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Southwest w/Grilled Chicken	320	9	3	960	6	11	30
Southwest w/Crispy Chicken	430	20	4	920	6	12	26
Southwest w/o Chicken	140	4.5	2	150	6	6	6
Bacon Ranch w/Grilled Chicken	260	9	4	1010	3	5	33
Bacon Ranch w/Crispy Chicken	370	20	6	970	3	6	29
Bacon Ranch w/o Chicken	140	7	3.5	300	3	4	9
Caesar w/Grilled Chicken	220	6	3	890	3	5	30
Caesar w/Crispy Chicken	330	17	4.5	840	3	6	26
Caesar w/o Chicken	90	4	2.5	180	3	4	7
Side Salad	20	0	0	10	1	2	1
Butter Garlic Croutons	60	1.5	0	140	1	0	2
Snack Size Fruit/Walnut Salad	210	8	1.5	60	2	25	4

I was about to say I'm thoroughly impressed by these salads. With the exception of the salt, each appears to be nice and manageable in terms of calories and saturated fat. However, there is a crucial piece missing to these salads:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Southwest Dressing	100	6	1	340	0	3	1
Caesar Dressing	190	18	3.5	500	0	2	2
Low Fat Balsamic Vinaigrette	40	3	0	730	0	3	0
Low Fat Italian Dressing	60	2.5	0	730	0	1	1
Ranch Dressing	170	15	2.5	530	0	4	1

THAT makes a lot more sense! The Caesar with Grilled Chicken, which looked pretty good on the fat content, jumps right back up after you add the dressing. For those who aren't aware, Caesar Dressing is one to avoid if you are watching your calories. In fact, most any "regular" dressing (i.e., not low-fat or fat-free) is a killer. If you are a fan of the Vinaigrette, definitely choose this option. And if you can get your protein from another source, you might want to skip the chicken in these salads. While they add a lot of protein, they also add a lot of sodium. It's hard to justify eating the chicken AND the dressing, since you're nudging yourself up to about 75% of the daily recommended sodium. Still, with the exception of the salt, there are definitely some good nutritional choices to be had with the salads.

I can't speak for anyone else. But McDonald's breakfast was one of the things I LOVED for many years. Notice I used the past tense there, as I cannot fathom myself going there for breakfast ever again. Here's why:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Egg McMuffin	300	12	5	820	2	3	18
Sausage McMuffin w/Egg	450	27	10	920	2	2	21
Bacon Egg and Cheese Biscuit	420	23	12	1160	2	3	15
Southern Style Chicken Biscuit	410	20	8	1180	2	3	17
Bacon/Egg/Cheese McGriddle	420	18	8	1110	2	15	15
Big Breakfast	740	48	17	1560	3	3	28
Big Breakfast w/Hotcakes	1090	56	19	2150	6	17	36
McSkillet Burrito w/Steak	570	30	12	1470	3	4	32
Hotcakes w/o Syrup/Margarine	350	9	2	590	3	14	8
Hotcake Syrup (one pkg)	180	0	0	20	0	32	0
Margarine (one pat)	40	4.5	1.5	55	0	0	0
Scrambled Eggs	170	11	4	180	0	0	15
Hash Brown	150	9	1.5	310	2	0	1
Preserves	35	0	0	0	0	9	0

I don't know if I really need to say much of anything here. The ONE "positive" I'll mention is the Egg McMuffin, which is McDonalds' signature breakfast sandwich, and also the healthiest one available. However, there is a certain eating establishment famous for SUBS now serving breakfast where you can get similar sandwiches for half the calories (hint, hint). The rest of the numbers speak for themselves. On a personal note, my favorite choice (after the Egg McMuffin) WAS the Big Breakfast with Hotcakes, typically with two syrups, two preserves packets, and a margarine pat. Totals for that meal? 1,560 calories (78% daily), 60.5 fat (94%), 20.5g saturated fat (100% daily), 2,245g sodium (93.5% daily), 6g fiber, 99g sugar, 36g protein. That was BREAKFAST.

And finally, we can't forget about beverages. Most of you are probably at least a little familiar with the difference in diet versus regular pop/soda, but how familiar are you with the rest of the beverages on the McDonalds menu? Take a look below and familiarize yourself with some of THESE bad boys:

Item	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Triple Thick Choc Shake (16 oz.)	580	14	8	250	1	84	13
1% Low Fat Milk	100	2.5	1.5	125	0	12	8
Medium Orange Juice	180	0	0	5	0	37	3
Large Coke (32 oz.)	310	0	0	20	0	86	0
Medium Caramel Iced Coffee	190	8	5	115	0	27	2
Medium Sweet Tea	150	0	0	10	0	38	0
Medium Nonfat Latte	110	0	0	140	0	15	10
Medium Whole Fat Latte	180	10	6	130	0	13	10
Small Hot Choc w/Nonfat Milk	250	5	3	140	0	37	8
Small Hot Choc w/Whole Milk	300	12	7	135	0	35	8
Small Caramel Frappe	450	20	13	130	0	57	6
Large Mocha Frappe	680	28	18	200	1	87	10

I have no idea what a Frappe is, but judging by the calories, fat, and sugar, it must be positively SINFUL. Those make a Triple Thick Chocolate Shake look like a diet drink. Who am I kidding—those aren't drinks, those are desserts!

The reality of drinks is they often end up being empty calories. Pop is basically sugar water. Tea and coffee are fine (as far as calories) if you don't add sugar or cream. There are always sugar substitutes available, like Splenda and Equal, but those tend to leave an aftertaste. Furthermore, research is starting to find some of those non-natural sugar substitutes actually increase appetite. If you can take your tea unsweetened and your coffee black, that is the way to go. If you can skip the beverage and just have water, that is the BEST way to go, especially if you are already eating a Big Mac and Large Fries!

So there you have it, McDonalds in a nutshell. I have to say I'm a little surprised I didn't find more healthy options available. It appears that anything healthy (typically involving chicken) is loaded with salt. I suspect this will be a theme in each column, as eating establishments tend to use salt to add flavor, so it would make sense that "boring old chicken" would be given an extra shot of salt. Here are your winners and losers (totally based on my own opinion):

<u>Winners</u>	<u>Losers</u>
Plain Hamburger	Quarter Pounder w/Cheese (never mind the DOUBLE Quarter Pounder I didn't even list)
Any Salad (no dressing)	Anything starting with "Angus" (which I again didn't list - I'll just say high calories, fat, saturated fat, insanely high sodium, and leave it at that)
Low Fat Balsamic Vinaigrette	Salads with any Dressing not labeled as Low Fat or Fat Free
Egg McMuffin	Everything on the Breakfast Menu not specifically called "Egg McMuffin"
Black Coffee or Unsweetened Tea	Anything on the Dessert Menu
Nonfat Lattes	Everything on the Beverage Menu except for those on the Winners List

Winners

Fruit/Yogurt Parfaits (160 calories,
2g fat)

Apple Dippers w/Caramel Sauce
(105 calories, 0.5g fat)

Small Sizes

Losers

Anything Large

Cheese

That's all I have for everyone this month. Is there an eating establishment you'd like me to review? If so, drop me an email at drboz75@yahoo.com. Or, if you have any other ideas for the column, feel free to send me a message. I'm definitely open to the feedback. Until next month, be healthy!