

A GUIDE TO (SLIGHTLY) HEALTHIER TAKEOUT

BY [MISSY WILKINSON](#)



COLE SALADINO/THRILLIST

Sure, you could bust out the chopping knife, cutting board, freshly washed produce, iron skillet... ugh, let's stop there, because I'm getting tired just thinking about cooking a meal from scratch. Or you could pay a kindly stranger to bring a steaming-hot meal to you

door for a night of #Netflixandstuffyourgreedyface.

You probably know delivery and takeout food isn't going to be as healthy as your average home-cooked meal. But it's SO convenient and if you make the right choices, it doesn't have to wreck your diet. Dietitian Lauren Harris-Pincus, owner of [Nutrition Starring You](#), and [internal medicine physician Monya De](#) share tips for getting your gluttony on in a healthier way.

The conceptual framework

Regardless of cuisine, the healthiest meals start with the right portion sizes and proportions of proteins, vegetables, and carbohydrates. So before you fire up Seamless, get the concept right. Remember the food pyramid, and before that, the square meal. Good. Now forget you ever heard of them, because the USDA's new dietary guidelines are all about a [plate](#): "Half [of your plate] should be produce, a quarter is protein, and a quarter is whole grains," says Harris-Pincus. With that in mind, pick your poison.

Chinese food: think steamed

Always, always order your meal steamed with sauce on the side, says Harris-Pincus, who was obese as a child and now knows "ever trick in the book" when it comes to saving calories. Otherwise, even an innocuous dish like chicken and broccoli will likely be stir-fried, soaking up plenty of oil and salt before taking a plunge in high-calorie sauce.

And the truth is, you don't need that much sauce to impart flavor -- a few tablespoons will do. "By ordering steamed veggies with chicken or shrimp, brown rice, and your favorite sauce on the side, you can save hundreds of calories," Harris-Pincus says. Make sure the steamed veggies take up half your plate, the protein a quarter, and the brown rice another quarter, and your meal will help you soar like a majestic golden dragon.



GRANT CONDON/THRILLIST

Pizza: make it a vessel for veggies

PIZZA!!! Sorry for shouting, but who doesn't [get excited about pizza](#)? Let's attack this using the plate concept. Heap your pie with veggies (make sure the pizzeria doesn't do anything sneaky, like deep-frying the eggplant), try a whole-grain crust, and eat a side salad or vegetable soup. "If you pile it with vegetables and eat a side salad or minestrone, you may be filled up with only one slice of pizza," Harris-Pincus says. And what about that old trick of sopping up grease with a paper napkin -- does it work? YES, Harris-Pincus says. Or you could just, you know, ask the kitchen to go easy on the cheese.



DAN GENTILE/THRILLIST

Sushi: avoid the sneaky hidden calories

Sushi's hidden calories can add up, and they come mostly in the form of mayonnaise, deep-fried tempura pieces, and white rice. Compared to a regular tuna roll, a spicy tuna roll can have an extra 100 calories due to mayonnaise, Harris-Pincus says. For a lighter option, avoid these items and ask the kitchen to go light on rice – or order sushi wrapped in cucumber. Dr. De recommends swapping white for brown rice to get an extra serving of whole grains.



ERIN JACKSON/THRILLIST

Italian: get creative with appetizers

Harris-Pincus steers clear of entrees when ordering from Italian eateries. “I get an appetizer portion of something like mussels marinara with a salad, like a beet and goat cheese salad, and that makes a balanced meal,” she says. “It’s not that hard; you just have to think outside the box.”

You can counteract the temptation presented by Gorgonzola cheese sauce and gnocchi by “ordering vegetable dishes that are hard to prepare yourself, like butternut squash and beets,” according to Dr. De. “These can be very nutrient-dense.” If you’re ordering a sub, get it on whole-grain bread and ask them to scoop out inside the loaf, if you can stand the humiliation of making the request. It’ll save you 40 or so calories, and makes room for all the vegetables you’ll want to shove on there.



COLE SALADINO/THRILLIST

Burgers and fries: mitigate the damage

They're the OG takeout item, and one of the unhealthiest. If you're craving a ground-up wad of [carcinogenic red meat](#), your strategy is all about harm reduction: countering it with beaucoup vegetables. Get a side salad instead of fries (almost every fast-food chain has one on the menu now) and for the love of God, order a normal size and not a double or triple decker.

If you're really craving fries, wrap your burger in a leaf of lettuce. "Minimize the damage," Harris-Pincus advises. "This is not the most heart-healthy meal, but if it's a small meat and fries and larger amounts of vegetables, it's just way more balanced."

Things to keep in mind no matter what you order

All national chains have food information online, so you can figure out the healthiest option with a simple Google search. Harris-Pincus recommends [HealthyDiningFinder.com](#) for sleuthing out healthy spots -- users can search for meals by nutrient. Don't hesitate to tweak your order by asking for a double helping of vegetables instead of a starch, for example. "Everyone has something going on, and [restaurants are] so used to people with allergies," Harris-Pincus says. Regardless of what you order, remember portion size is a critical factor. "If you eat a bagel the size of an inner tube, there's not much you can do to fix that meal."

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[Missy Wilkinson](#) is getting Mexican tonight, heavy on the grilled veggies. Follow her: [@missy_wilkinson](#).

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