

# Avoiding **Deceptive Dishes** When Dining Out



Contributed by:  
Wellness  
Workdays™

Finding healthful and nutritious options when eating out can be challenging. While restaurants in some jurisdictions are required to provide nutritional information on menus, restaurants in other states/municipalities are not.

When nutritional information is not available, many diners will order a salad if they are trying to choose a healthful meal. Not so fast! A quick peek at the nutrition facts (now posted on most fast food websites) shows one of these "healthier option" salads can pack a whole day's worth of calories, sodium and saturated fat.

At the Cheesecake Factory, for example, when deciding between a healthful (or at least seemingly harmless) chicken Caesar salad or the "Factory Burger" with cheese and sautéed onions, the healthier choice may seem obvious; most people would choose the chicken Caesar salad. However, the salad contains an astounding 1,510 calories, 16 grams of saturated fat and 1,450 mg of sodium. On the other hand, the "Factory Burger" contains "only" 740 calories, 16 grams of saturated fat and 1,020 mg of sodium.

How can this be? Salads are supposed to be good for you, or at least have fewer calories than a cheeseburger, right? The reality is that not all salads are created equally. A salad containing dark greens, colorful raw vegetables and a moderate amount of oil-based dressing is a great choice. However, a salad containing fried chicken, croutons, cheese and creamy, full-fat dressing can turn a healthy salad into a meal containing more than 1,500 calories.

**Bottom Line:** Read restaurant nutritional information before eating out. When researching beforehand isn't an option, ask your server if the restaurant can provide nutritional information. If you can't get the information you need, stick to simple salads with fresh vegetables, fruit, a moderate amount of grilled lean protein, and order dressing on the side.

*Debra Wein, MS, RD, NSCA-CPT, CWPD, is a nationally recognized expert on health and wellness and has designed award winning programs for both individuals and corporations across the country. She is president and founder of Wellness Workdays, a leading provider of worksite wellness programs, and has nearly 20 years of experience working in the health and wellness industry. Debra is also the Program Director for the Wellness Workdays Dietetic Internship, the only ACEND-approved worksite wellness focused internship for dietetics students interested in becoming Registered Dietitians.*

