How to Dine Out When Dieting

When dieting a lot of bodybuilders shy away from social events, cancelling or missing plans due to fears of messing up their diet. But this doesn't have to be you! In all my years of competing, I still managed to be the social butterfly I am, going out most weekends while still getting absolutely shredded for all my shows. Life's too short not to have fun, and dieting is hard enough without turning into a hermit. You just have to plan ahead, make some mindful choices and ditch any insecurities about asking for exactly what you want when dining out. And I'm going to teach you how.

I love food, and I especially love nothing more than going out for lunch on the weekend, where I eat and laugh with my friends and family for hours on end. This quality time has always been important to me and something I've been unwilling to sacrifice, even while in the depths of a diet. I would even go as far as saying sticking to my regular social schedule helped me stick to my shred as I didn't get sad about missing out on special occasions. It was a sense of normality amongst the hours of training, cardio and meal prep.

So, how are you going to dine out when dieting? First off, do your research. If you are going to a restaurant, check the menu online and ring up to double-check that it is the most up-to-date version. While you are on the phone, it can be the perfect time to pre-warn them that you are shredding and may need to make some special requests at the restaurant. You may feel self-conscious about this at the start. Remember, when you are going to a restaurant, you are paying for a service, and that service is to serve you.

When reviewing the menu online, look for the protein options, soups, salads and green cruciferous sides. Tofu should be readily available in most restaurants, but seitan can be a little harder to come by. I had no shame when eating out and meeting my protein goals. If a restaurant didn't have what I wanted, I would pre-prepare my protein and bring it in Tupperware. I would order a soup and crumble my tofu into it or order a large green salad or green cruciferous vegetable side to eat with my seitan. And honestly, nobody in the restaurant would bat an eyelid. Most of the side dishes on a menu will be free food if they cook without oil. So I would bring my pre-prepared tofu or protein, order from the side dishes and not count the calories and tip my prepared protein onto the plate!

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When you are ordering, be very specific with what you want. Ask for any of your protein sources or sides to be grilled, baked or steamed and NOT fried. Ask for calorie-rich extras like creamy sauces or butter to not be used in the cooking process. Make green cruciferous vegetables the star of the show and order massive portions of them to fill up on the fiber, but be very clear that you don't want butter slathered all over them. Chef's are always thinking about how they can add flavor to their food, and with that comes typically a lot of calories. So you need to be very specific about what you want to order.

One thing I did miss when dieting was alcohol. I do enjoy a couple of glasses of champagne when eating out, but when I was shredding for the stage, I would make the short-term sacrifice of no alcohol for my shredding goals. To feel included when everyone else was slugging from their champagne glasses, I ordered carbonated water with a squeeze of lemon and lime served in a champagne glass. I would still laugh, cheer and enjoy the experience, minus the sore head afterwards. And it's amazing how when you are sipping on something, it really doesn't matter that it's not alcohol! I learned not to feel left out when dieting for shows and that actually, you really don't need alcohol to have a good time. I know that sounds silly. I always love to be in rapport with my friends when we are out for dinner, so I did think I would miss drinking. And I was surprised by how easy it was not to drink.

Remember that dining out is about way more than just the food. It's about connecting and enjoying the company of whoever you are with. There will be plenty of other times when you are not shredding and can eat and drink anything and everything. But a wonderful thing happens when you start to get more data about doing things differently; you build a data bank of experience of your strength when you overcame adversity and stuck to your goals. That feels far better in the long run. Being successful in anything is about sacrificing what you want now for what you want most. When you can train yourself to overcome short term desires for long term gain, the pay off is incredible.

TOP TIPS FOR DINING OUT WHEN DIETING

1. CHECK THE MENU IN ADVANCE

Review the restaurant's menu online before you go to get an idea of your options. Look for protein, soups, salads and green cruciferous sides.

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2. BRING YOUR PROTEIN WITH YOU IF NECESSARY

If the restaurant doesn't have appropriate protein options, pre-prepare yours and bring it with you in Tupperware. Either order a soup to crumble your tofu into or a large green salad or green cruciferous vegetable side to eat with your seitan.

3. LOAD UP ON GREEN CRUCIFEROUS VEGETABLES

Make green cruciferous vegetables the star of the show and order massive portions of them to fill up on the fiber. And/or choose green salads as a main course.

4. CHOOSE GRILLED, BAKED, OR STEAMED SIDES

For any side dishes you order, request that they be grilled, baked, or steamed instead of fried. Most of the side dishes on a menu will be free food if they cook without oil.

5. WATCH FOR HIDDEN CALORIES

Be mindful of calorie-rich extras like creamy sauces or butter being used in the cooking process. Request for them not to be used.

6. STAY HYDRATED

Drinking water before and during your meal can help you feel fuller, which can help with the temptation to order anything off-plan. If you are missing your favorite alcoholic beverages, I suggest ordering carbonated water with a squeeze of lemon and lime in a champagne or wine glass. It's amazing how when you are sipping on something, it really doesn't matter that it's not alcohol!

7. FOCUS ON THE DINING EXPERIENCE, NOT JUST THE FOOD

Dining out is about way more than just the food. It's about connecting and enjoying the company of whomever you are with. There will be plenty of other times when you are not shredding and can eat and drink anything and everything. But for now, have fun and enjoy your dining experience while sticking to your shredding goals.