

SHRED ARMY NUTRITION

EAT OUT. STAY SHREDDED.

THE RESTAURANT & FAST-FOOD FIELD GUIDE



ORDER WITH A PLAN • ENJOY THE MEAL • KEEP THE MISSION MOVING

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SHRED ARMY PRACTICAL NUTRITION SERIES

Read This First

This guide is educational. It does not diagnose or treat a medical condition and it does not replace advice from a physician or registered dietitian. If you have diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disease, food allergies, celiac disease, are pregnant, take medication affected by food or alcohol, or have another condition that changes what you should eat, use your clinician's plan.

If you have a history of binge eating, purging, severe restriction, compulsive exercise, or intense fear around food, do not turn this guide into a stricter set of food rules. The goal is flexible structure, not punishment. A restaurant meal does not need to be earned, burned off, or repaid the next day.

In this book, **clean eating** means building most meals from recognizable, nutrient-dense foods while managing portions, preparation methods, and extras. It does not mean that a food or person is morally clean or dirty. Food quality matters, and so do flexibility, enjoyment, culture, affordability, and consistency.

THE SHRED ARMY STANDARD: Enjoy the meal, honor the mission, and make the next useful choice. Perfection is not required.

How to Use This Field Guide

Read Parts I and II once to build your personal restaurant protocol. Then use the cuisine playbooks and quick-reference pages before you order. The system works at a steakhouse, drive-through, airport, business dinner, buffet, coffee shop, or family restaurant.

The central idea is simple: **control what moves the meal most.**

- Start with a meaningful protein source.
- Add vegetables or fruit when available.
- Choose a carbohydrate portion that fits the day and your training.
- Account for cooking fats, sauces, cheese, dressings, and drinks.
- Decide the portion before hunger and momentum decide for you.
- Return to your normal plan at the next meal.

This guide gives sample orders, not commandments. Restaurant recipes and nutrition information change. Check the current menu, app, or nutrition page when exact calories, sodium, allergens, or macros matter.

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Introduction — Restaurants Are Not the Enemy

Eating away from home is normal life. It is where families celebrate, teams connect, couples spend time together, travelers refuel, and busy people solve a practical problem. A nutrition plan that works only in your own kitchen is not yet a complete plan.

The challenge is not that restaurant food is automatically bad. The challenge is that restaurants optimize for flavor, value, speed, and repeat business. More oil, salt, sugar, sauce, cheese, breading, and larger portions often help achieve those goals. Research consistently finds that meals eaten away from home tend to carry more energy, sodium, and saturated fat than meals prepared at home.^{[1][2]}

The answer is not to fear restaurants. It is to arrive with a decision system.

Federal menu-labeling rules require many chains with 20 or more locations to post calories for standard menu items and provide additional written nutrition information on request.^[3] That information is useful, but calorie labels alone do not make the decision. Research on menu labeling suggests the average effect is modest and variable.^[4] The advantage comes from combining the information with a personal plan.

A restaurant meal becomes easier the moment you stop asking, “What am I allowed to eat?” and start asking, “What combination best supports my goal today?”

The Five-Point Restaurant Win

Score the meal before you judge it. A meal can be a win without being perfect.

POINT	THE WIN	CHECK THE MEAL
1	Protein	Does the meal contain a meaningful protein anchor?
1	Produce	Did I include vegetables or fruit when available?
1	Portion	Did I decide the amount before momentum decided for me?
1	Preparation	Did I control cooking method, sauce, dressing, or added fat?
1	Purpose	Did I choose drinks, sides, and extras intentionally?

A score of four or five is an excellent restaurant meal. Three is a workable choice. A score of one or two is information, not failure. Learn what moved the meal and use that lesson next time.

Part I — Build the Protocol

MISSION BRIEFING

1. What Clean Eating Means Away From Home

The current Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasize whole, nutrient-dense foods such as protein foods, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, dairy, and whole grains while recommending a major reduction in highly processed foods, refined carbohydrates, excess sodium, and added sugars.^[4] That is a useful foundation, but it must be translated into restaurant behavior.

At a restaurant, clean eating is not a perfect ingredient list. It is a series of practical choices:

- **Food quality:** Choose recognizable protein foods, vegetables, fruits, beans, potatoes, rice, or whole grains more often.
- **Preparation:** Favor grilled, roasted, baked, broiled, steamed, poached, or dry-seared preparations more often than deep-fried, battered, breaded, or cream-based preparations.
- **Portion awareness:** Decide how much of a large entrée you want before you are halfway through it.
- **Extra control:** Treat oil, butter, dressing, mayo, cheese, sugary sauces, appetizers, alcohol, and dessert as choices—not invisible background.
- **Flexibility:** Allow planned enjoyment without turning one meal into an all-day free-for-all.

The 80/20 Restaurant Mindset

Most of the meal should serve the goal. A smaller part can serve enjoyment. That could mean grilled fish, vegetables, and potatoes with a shared dessert. It could mean a burger with a side salad instead of the automatic fries, while keeping the bun. It could mean tacos with beans and salsa, then enjoying chips intentionally instead of eating them without noticing.

The exact percentage is not important. The principle is: **make the foundation strong enough that enjoyment does not have to become abandonment.**

Stop Moralizing the Menu

When food is divided into pure and forbidden categories, restaurant meals can become a test of character. That mindset often produces anxiety before the meal and overcorrection afterward. Use functional language instead:

- Higher calorie or lower calorie
- Higher protein or lower protein
- More filling or less filling
- Everyday choice or occasional choice
- Fits today's target or requires an adjustment

This language protects honesty without adding shame.

Clean eating is a pattern, not a purity contest.

2. Know Your Targets Before You Order

You cannot stay on a protocol that has never been defined. Before focusing on restaurants, know the basic targets that guide your normal day.

The Four Numbers That Matter Most

1. **Daily calorie range.** Use the range set by your coach or dietitian. If you are not tracking, use portions and meal frequency instead of inventing a false-precision number.
2. **Daily protein target.** The 2025–2030 federal guidelines suggest 1.2–1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day for the general adult pattern, adjusted for calorie needs.^[1] Athletes, older adults, and people with medical conditions may need individualized guidance.
3. **Meal protein target.** Divide the daily target across meals. For many adults, a restaurant meal containing roughly 25–50 grams of protein is a useful range, depending on body size and the rest of the day.
4. **Carbohydrate timing.** If performance matters, place more of the day's carbohydrate near training rather than cutting carbohydrates blindly.

Pick the Meal's Job

Every meal cannot maximize every goal. Decide the primary job before ordering.

- **Fat-loss meal:** High protein, high produce, controlled energy density, minimal liquid calories.
- **Maintenance meal:** Balanced plate with room for one intentional extra.
- **Performance meal:** High protein plus a purposeful carbohydrate serving before or after training; moderate fat if training is close.
- **Social meal:** Enough structure to stay grounded while giving more room for a favorite food, drink, or dessert.
- **Recovery meal:** Easy-to-digest food, fluids, carbohydrate, and protein after demanding training or travel.

Use Ranges, Not Fragile Exactness

Restaurant nutrition numbers are estimates. Portions vary, cooks vary, custom orders vary, and an extra spoon of oil can change the energy content substantially. Use a target range rather than demanding a perfect calculation.

For example, a fat-loss lunch might be:

- 450–650 calories
- 35–50 grams of protein
- At least one serving of vegetables or fruit
- Water, unsweetened tea, diet beverage, or black coffee

Your range may be different. The power comes from deciding it before the menu starts negotiating with you.

3. Why Restaurant Calories Add Up So Fast

Restaurant meals are often difficult to estimate because several calorie-dense variables stack together. A full-service meal analyzed in one study—an entrée, side, and half an appetizer—averaged about 1,495 calories, 28 grams of saturated fat, and 3,512 milligrams of sodium before adding a full appetizer, dessert, or caloric drink.^[5] Not every meal is that large, but the study illustrates how quickly separate choices combine.

The Seven Hidden Multipliers

1. Cooking fat

Oil and butter can be absorbed during sautéing, grilling, roasting, and finishing. A food can look lean while carrying several tablespoons of added fat. Ask for light oil or butter when it matters, but remember that a restaurant may not be able to produce a truly oil-free dish.

2. Sauces and dressings

Cream sauces, mayo-based spreads, cheese sauces, pesto, aioli, sweet glazes, and salad dressing can change a moderate entrée into a high-calorie meal. “On the side” is useful because it restores portion control.

3. Portion size

Restaurant portions often contain more than one meal's worth of food. A larger portion also resets what looks normal. Decide on the portion before eating, especially when the plate arrives obviously oversized.

4. Bundled sides

Fries, chips, bread, biscuits, creamy slaw, and loaded potatoes may feel free because they come with the meal. They still count. Choose the side with the same intention you use for the entrée.

5. Liquid calories

Sweet tea, soda, lemonade, specialty coffee, juice, milkshakes, and alcohol add energy with less fullness than a plated meal. FDA consumer guidance specifically notes that beverage calories can add up quickly.

^[6]

6. Sodium

Restaurant food is often sodium-dense, and consumers tend to underestimate how much sodium a meal contains.^[7] The FDA Daily Value is less than 2,300 milligrams per day for most adults, though some people have individualized medical targets.^[8] Sodium does not create body fat by itself, but it can increase thirst and temporary water retention and is important for blood-pressure management.

7. The permission cascade

The thought “I already blew it” can add more calories than the original choice. One appetizer becomes drinks, entrée, dessert, and late-night eating because the day has been declared lost. The recovery skill is to stop the cascade at the next decision.

The biggest restaurant mistake is rarely one ingredient. It is the unplanned stack.

Part II — Execute the Order

MISSION BRIEFING

4. The Five-Minute Pre-Order Mission

Use this sequence before arriving or while waiting for the table. It takes less time than scrolling social media and prevents most avoidable mistakes.

Step 1 — Check the menu early

Open the restaurant's current menu or app. At chains, compare calories and protein when available. If sodium matters, request or open the full nutrition information; the posted calorie number does not reveal sodium.^[3]

Step 2 — Choose the protein anchor

Find the leanest practical protein source that you would genuinely enjoy: chicken, turkey, fish, shrimp, lean beef, eggs, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu, tempeh, beans, lentils, or a combination.

Step 3 — Choose produce

Add vegetables, salad, fruit, salsa, pico de gallo, or a broth-based vegetable soup. Produce adds volume, nutrients, fiber, and color. It also gives the plate structure before dense extras fill the space.

Step 4 — Choose one primary starch

Examples include rice, potato, beans, pasta, bread, tortilla, oats, or fruit. You may need more around training, but avoid accidentally selecting bread plus chips plus fries plus dessert because each arrived through a different part of the menu.

Step 5 — Pre-decide the extra

Choose the extra you care about most: appetizer, fries, cheese, alcohol, dessert, or a richer sauce. You do not always need an extra. When you want one, choosing it in advance prevents the meal from becoming a collection of automatic upgrades.

The Emergency Snack Rule

If the meal is more than an hour away and you are extremely hungry, eat a small planned snack with protein or produce: Greek yogurt, a protein shake, fruit with a measured portion of nuts, cottage cheese, or jerky plus fruit. The purpose is not to spoil dinner. It is to bring hunger down from emergency level so your judgment can work.

Never arrive at a high-risk menu with low blood sugar, no plan, and the belief that willpower will rescue you.

5. Decode Any Menu

Menu language is a clue—not a guarantee. Use it to create a short list, then confirm the details that matter.

START HERE	ASK A QUESTION	COUNT THE EXTRAS
Grilled, broiled, baked, roasted, steamed, poached	Blackened, sautéed, glazed, marinated, house-made	Fried, battered, breaded, crispy, smothered
Fresh fruit, plain potato, rice, beans, vegetables	Salad, bowl, wrap, plant-based, low-carb	Creamy, loaded, cheesy, buttered, candied
Salsa, pico, mustard, herbs, citrus	Pesto, vinaigrette, stir-fry sauce, curry	Aioli, mayo, queso, cream sauce, sweet glaze

Questions That Change the Meal

You do not need to interrogate the server. Ask one or two high-value questions:

- “Is that grilled with oil or butter, and can you use a light amount?”
- “Can I get the sauce or dressing on the side?”
- “Can I substitute vegetables, fruit, beans, or a plain potato for the fries?”
- “Can you double the vegetables?”
- “Can the cheese, mayo, or crispy topping be left off?”
- “Can I get a lunch portion or half portion?”
- “Can you box half before it comes out?”

The Order Script

Use calm, ordinary language:

“I’ll have the grilled salmon with the vegetables and potato. Please use light oil, put any butter or sauce on the side, and bring water.”

There is no need to announce a diet, apologize, or explain your body goals. A precise order is easier for everyone than a vague request for something healthy.

Do Not Confuse “Salad” With “Low Calorie”

A restaurant salad can include fried protein, cheese, bacon, nuts, avocado, tortilla strips, dried fruit, croutons, and several ounces of dressing. Those ingredients are not automatically bad, but together they may exceed the entrée you avoided.

Build the salad deliberately:

- Greens and colorful vegetables
- Grilled protein or beans
- One or two energy-dense toppings
- Dressing on the side
- Bread or a starch if it fits the meal

6. Build the Plate

When exact nutrition data are unavailable, use a visual portion framework. It will not produce laboratory precision, but it is far better than guessing from hunger.

COMPONENT	VISUAL START	JOB	ADJUSTMENT
Protein	1–2 palms	Anchor fullness, muscle, and recovery	Use more for larger bodies or a meal carrying more of the daily target
Produce	1–2 fists	Add volume, color, fiber, and nutrients	Double when the meal is otherwise energy-dense
Carbohydrate	1 cupped hand or fist	Support activity, training, and preference	Increase near hard training; reduce on lower-need meals
Added fat	1 thumb or measured portion	Flavor, satisfaction, and essential fats	Count cooking oil, dressing, cheese, nuts, avocado, and sauce together

Protein First

Protein supports muscle, recovery, and fullness. The current federal guidelines place protein at every meal and identify both animal and plant sources.^[1] At restaurants, protein is often diluted by breading, buns, cheese, or sauce. Look at the actual portion of meat, fish, eggs, tofu, or beans—not just the entrée name.

Useful restaurant anchors include:

- 4–8 ounces grilled chicken, turkey, fish, shrimp, lean beef, or pork
- Egg or egg-white combination with a lean breakfast protein
- Tofu or tempeh with vegetables
- Beans plus another protein source when needed
- Greek yogurt or cottage cheese at breakfast cafés

Vegetables and Fruit

The 2025–2030 guidelines emphasize a variety of colorful vegetables and fruits and list general targets of three vegetable servings and two fruit servings daily.^[1] Restaurants can help fill that target if you ask for produce deliberately.

Choose steamed, grilled, roasted, or fresh vegetables. Creamed vegetables, butter-heavy preparations, and candied sides may still be enjoyable, but count them as richer choices rather than free vegetables.

Carbohydrates With a Job

Carbohydrates are not the enemy. Choose them according to activity, preference, and medical needs.

- Near training: rice, potato, oats, fruit, beans, pasta, or bread can support performance and recovery.
- On a lower-activity day: use a smaller portion while keeping protein and produce high.
- At a celebration: enjoy a favorite starch and reduce other dense extras rather than trying to remove every carbohydrate.

Fats Count Fast

Avocado, nuts, seeds, olive oil, cheese, butter, and creamy sauces can fit a nutritious diet, but they are energy-dense. If the entrée already includes a fatty protein, cheese, and sauce, adding avocado, nuts, and dressing may be unnecessary.

7. Control Portions Without Making Dinner Awkward

Portion control should be quiet and practical. It should not turn dinner into a performance.

Decide Before the First Bite

When the plate arrives, take five seconds to assess it. If the portion is clearly larger than your plan:

- Move the amount you intend to eat to one side of the plate.
- Ask for a box immediately or halfway through.
- Share the entrée or side.
- Order an appetizer-size protein plus vegetables.
- Choose a lunch portion.

The Twenty-Minute Pause

Eat at a pace that lets fullness register. Put the utensil down occasionally. Drink water. Participate in the conversation. At the first comfortable pause, ask:

- Am I still physically hungry?
- Is the food still tasting as good as the first few bites?
- Would more improve the experience, or only extend it?
- Do I want the rest more than I want tomorrow's leftovers?

Stopping at comfortable satisfaction is not wasteful. If food can be saved safely, take it home. If it cannot, your body is not a trash can.

Bread, Chips, and Shared Appetizers

These foods are difficult because the portion is communal and continuously available. Use one of three plans:

1. **Pass:** Save the appetite for the entrée.
2. **Plate:** Put the amount you intend to eat on your plate once.
3. **Share:** Split one appetizer and skip another dense extra later.

Avoid the endless reach. Food eaten from a shared basket is easy to forget and hard to estimate.

Dessert Without the Spiral

If dessert matters, plan it. Share one, order a small portion, or take a few intentional bites. Dessert is easier to enjoy when it is not mixed with guilt.

The mistake is not dessert. The mistake is using dessert to declare the protocol over.

Part III — Cuisine Playbooks

MISSION BRIEFING

8. Sit-Down Restaurants

Use these playbooks as templates. Menus and recipes differ, so ask questions when ingredients, sodium, or allergens matter.

American Grill, Steakhouse, and Pub

Build: Grilled chicken, fish, sirloin, filet, pork tenderloin, turkey burger, or single-patty burger; vegetables or side salad; plain baked potato, rice, fruit, or beans.

Watch: Butter finishes, loaded potatoes, creamy vegetables, fried onions, cheese sauces, double patties, large fries, and unlimited bread.

Reliable orders:

- Sirloin with steamed vegetables and a plain baked potato; butter on the side.
- Grilled salmon with vegetables and rice; sauce on the side.
- Single burger with vegetables or salad; keep the bun and skip either cheese or mayo.
- Grilled chicken sandwich with mustard, vegetables, and fruit or salad.

Mexican and Latin

Build: Grilled chicken, steak, shrimp, fish, beans, fajita vegetables, lettuce, salsa, pico de gallo, corn tortillas, rice, and controlled portions of guacamole or cheese.

Watch: The chip basket, queso, sour cream, oversized burritos, fried shells, creamy sauces, and layering rice plus beans plus tortilla plus chips without deciding.

Reliable orders:

- Burrito bowl with grilled protein, fajita vegetables, beans, salsa, lettuce, and a measured rice portion.
- Three street-style tacos with grilled meat, onions, cilantro, salsa, and beans or salad.
- Fajitas with grilled protein and vegetables; choose tortillas or rice as the main starch.
- Grilled fish with beans, vegetables, salsa, and corn tortillas.

Italian and Pizza

Build: Grilled fish or chicken, lean meat sauce, tomato-based sauce, vegetables, salad, broth-based soup, and a deliberate pasta or pizza portion.

Watch: Cream sauces, oil-soaked bread, unlimited breadsticks, fried appetizers, large cheese portions, and entrées that combine breaded meat with cheese and pasta.

Reliable orders:

- Grilled chicken or fish with vegetables and a side of pasta with tomato sauce.
- Pasta with marinara and grilled chicken or shrimp; take half home if the portion is large.
- Thin-crust pizza with vegetables and a protein topping; pair one or two slices with salad.
- Minestrone or broth-based soup, salad with dressing on the side, and a protein add-on.

Chinese

Build: Steamed or lightly stir-fried chicken, shrimp, fish, tofu, or lean beef; mixed vegetables; steamed rice; sauce on the side when possible.

Watch: Battered proteins, sweet sticky sauces, large noodle portions, fried rice, egg rolls, and sodium-heavy sauces. Even lighter-looking dishes may be high in sodium.

Reliable orders:

- Steamed chicken or shrimp with vegetables, rice, and sauce on the side.
- Beef and broccoli with light sauce and a controlled rice portion.
- Tofu with vegetables and steamed rice; request less oil if available.
- Broth-based soup plus a vegetable-protein entrée shared family style.

Thai and Vietnamese

Build: Grilled meat or shrimp, broth-based soups, papaya salad, fresh rolls, vegetables, rice, and herbs.

Watch: Coconut-milk curries, fried appetizers, large noodle bowls, sweet sauces, and sugary drinks. Coconut milk is not unhealthy, but it is energy-dense.

Reliable orders:

- Grilled chicken or shrimp with vegetables and jasmine rice.
- Pho with lean protein, extra vegetables, herbs, and a portion of noodles that fits the meal.
- Fresh spring rolls plus grilled protein or broth-based soup.
- Curry with extra vegetables and a measured rice portion; enjoy it as the meal's richer choice.

Japanese and Sushi

Build: Sashimi, nigiri, simple rolls, grilled fish or chicken, edamame, seaweed salad, vegetables, and rice.

Watch: Tempura, spicy mayo, cream cheese, crunchy toppings, eel sauce, multiple specialty rolls, and sodium from soy sauce and soups.

Reliable orders:

- Sashimi plus rice, edamame, and vegetables.
- Nigiri and one simple roll with a side salad.
- Grilled salmon or chicken with vegetables and rice; sauce on the side.
- Poke bowl with lean fish, vegetables, a measured rice base, and one rich topping.

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern

Build: Grilled chicken, fish, kebab, lean lamb, hummus, lentil soup, Greek salad, tabbouleh, vegetables, rice, and pita.

Watch: Large oil pours, fried falafel, creamy garlic sauce, oversized hummus portions, and selecting both full rice and pita portions automatically.

Reliable orders:

- Chicken kebab with salad, vegetables, and rice or pita.
- Grilled fish with Greek salad and potatoes.
- Lentil soup with chicken or a Greek-yogurt-based side.
- Shawarma plate with extra salad, sauce on the side, and one primary starch.

Indian

Build: Tandoori chicken or fish, kebabs, lentils, chickpeas, vegetables, tomato-based dishes, raita, and controlled rice or bread portions.

Watch: Cream, ghee, coconut milk, fried appetizers, large naan portions, and combining several rich curries with unlimited rice.

Reliable orders:

- Tandoori chicken with vegetables, dal, and a measured rice portion.
- Grilled kebab with salad, raita, and one piece of bread.
- Chickpea or lentil dish with vegetables and rice; ask about oil if needed.
- Share one rich curry while making grilled protein and vegetables the foundation.

Seafood

Build: Grilled, baked, broiled, blackened, steamed, or poached fish and shellfish; vegetables; rice or potato.

Watch: Fry baskets, butter sauces, creamy chowders, breading, and “blackened” preparations cooked in large amounts of butter.

Reliable orders:

- Grilled white fish with vegetables and potato.
- Peel-and-eat shrimp with salad and rice; watch sauces and sodium.
- Broiled salmon with vegetables.
- Raw bar or ceviche with a planned side, if food safety and medical needs allow.

9. Fast Food Without Losing the Mission

Fast food is not automatically a failed meal. It is a fast decision environment built around bundles, upgrades, fried sides, sauces, and caloric drinks. The goal is to break the bundle and build the meal item by item.

The Fast-Food Build

STEP	DEFAULT TRAP	MISSION BUILD	WHY IT WORKS
1	Combo first	Choose the protein entrée first	The entrée—not the bundle—sets the meal
2	Largest size	Choose the smallest satisfying size	Cuts energy without changing the food
3	Fried side	Fruit, salad, beans, vegetables, chili, or small fries	Makes the side intentional
4	Automatic sauce	Use one sauce or request it on the side	Restores control of fat, sugar, and sodium
5	Caloric drink	Water, unsweetened drink, or planned beverage	Prevents liquid calories from becoming invisible

Burger Restaurants

Choose a single burger or grilled protein sandwich. Keep the bun if it fits. Remove or reduce mayo, special sauce, cheese, bacon, and fried toppings based on what you value most. Add lettuce, tomato, onion, and pickles. Choose fruit, a side salad, chili, or a small fry instead of automatically accepting a large fry.

Chicken Restaurants

Grilled chicken is often the simplest anchor when available. If the restaurant specializes in fried chicken, choose a smaller portion, remove one other dense extra, and pair it with a vegetable, fruit, beans, or slaw. Sauces can contribute substantial sugar, sodium, and calories; use one intentionally.

Burrito and Taco Chains

Use a bowl, salad, or tacos. Start with grilled protein, beans, fajita vegetables, salsa, and lettuce. Then choose the amount of rice, cheese, guacamole, sour cream, or queso that fits. The problem is rarely one topping; it is selecting every topping at full portion.

Sandwich Shops

Choose a six-inch sandwich, half sandwich, wrap, or salad with turkey, chicken, roast beef, tuna, egg, or a plant protein. Add vegetables. Use mustard, vinegar, or a measured amount of dressing. Cheese, mayo, oil, chips, cookies, and sugary drinks are the main stack to manage.

Pizza

Choose thin crust when you prefer it, add vegetables and a protein topping, and decide the slice count in advance. Pair pizza with a large salad or vegetables. Do not stand over the box eating the uncounted final slices.

Coffee Shops

Coffee shops sell drinks that can function like desserts. Choose brewed coffee, cold brew, Americano, espresso, unsweetened tea, or a drink with a controlled amount of milk and syrup. For food, look for eggs, oatmeal, Greek yogurt, fruit, or a breakfast sandwich with a clear protein source.

The App Advantage

Use the current restaurant app to compare versions of the same meal before reaching the counter. Compare:

- Single versus double
- Grilled versus fried
- Small versus large
- Sandwich alone versus combo
- Water or zero-calorie drink versus sweetened beverage
- No sauce versus standard sauce
- Side salad or fruit versus fries

The posted number is not a judgment. It is decision support.

10. Breakfast, Coffee, Desserts, and Drinks

Breakfast and Brunch

Breakfast menus can combine eggs, cheese, bacon, sausage, buttered toast, pancakes, syrup, potatoes, and sweet coffee in one order. Keep the structure simple.

Reliable builds:

- Eggs or egg whites plus lean protein, fruit, and toast.

- Omelet with vegetables and a controlled cheese portion; fruit or potatoes on the side.
- Greek yogurt with fruit and a measured portion of granola or nuts.
- Oatmeal with fruit plus eggs, yogurt, or a protein shake.
- Breakfast sandwich with egg and lean protein; remove one cheese or sauce layer if needed.

If pancakes, waffles, or French toast are the reason you came, enjoy them intentionally. Add a protein source, order a smaller portion, and use syrup or butter in a controlled amount rather than pretending the meal is protein-rich because it includes one egg.

Coffee and Specialty Drinks

Use the smallest size that satisfies you. Ask how many syrup pumps are standard. Request fewer pumps, unsweetened flavor, or no whipped cream when desired. Milk adds nutrition and calories; syrup and toppings add mostly energy. Decide whether the drink is a beverage, snack, or dessert and count it accordingly.

Alcohol

Alcohol can lower inhibition, increase appetite, disrupt sleep, and add calories before food choices begin. If you drink:

- Decide the number before the first drink.
- Alternate with water.
- Avoid arriving hungry.
- Prefer simple drinks over sugar-heavy cocktails when calories matter.
- Never drive after drinking.
- Avoid alcohol if pregnant, underage, taking interacting medication, in recovery from alcohol misuse, or advised not to drink by a clinician.

Alcohol is optional. You never owe anyone an explanation for declining.

Dessert

Use one of four plans:

1. Skip because you are satisfied.
2. Share one dessert.
3. Order a small individual portion.
4. Choose dessert as the meal's main extra and simplify the entrée.

Eat it seated, slowly, and without moral commentary. Stop when satisfaction falls, even if some remains.

Part IV — Real Life

MISSION BRIEFING

11. Business Dinners, Family Meals, Travel, and Buffets

Business Dinners

The purpose is often the relationship, not the food. Review the menu early so ordering takes little attention. Choose a simple entrée, order water, and keep alcohol within a pre-decided boundary or decline it.

Useful phrases:

- “I’m good with water tonight.”
- “I’ll start with the grilled fish.”
- “Sauce on the side, please.”
- “No dessert for me, but please go ahead.”
- “That was excellent; I’m taking the rest home.”

You do not need to discuss calories, weight, or dieting at the table.

Family and Social Pressure

People may encourage food because feeding is love, culture, celebration, or habit. Use appreciation plus a boundary:

- “It looks great. I’m starting with this amount.”
- “I’m full, but I’d love to take some home.”
- “I’m keeping dinner simple tonight.”
- “I’m saving room for the dessert I really want.”

Do not argue about nutrition. Repeat the boundary calmly.

Buffets

Buffets reward scanning before serving.

1. Walk the entire line without a plate.
2. Choose the protein anchor.
3. Fill at least half the plate with vegetables, salad, or fruit when practical.
4. Choose one or two starches you genuinely want.
5. Use one plate first.
6. Wait ten minutes before returning.

7. If you return, choose one favorite—not another sample of everything.

Airports and Road Trips

Travel increases exposure to convenience food and decreases predictability. Carry an emergency option: protein powder, a shelf-stable shake, tuna pouch, jerky, fruit, measured nuts, or a protein bar that fits your needs.

At the airport, look for:

- Egg breakfast sandwich or oatmeal plus eggs
- Grilled chicken salad or bowl
- Sushi with simple rolls or sashimi
- Turkey or chicken sandwich with fruit
- Greek yogurt and fruit
- Burger or tacos ordered with the fast-food build

Delivery

Delivery apps encourage add-ons. Build the entrée first, remove default extras, review the final cart, and order only the amount you intend to eat. Put leftovers away before settling in front of a screen.

12. Allergies, Medical Needs, and Special Diets

This section is safety guidance, not a substitute for your treatment plan.

Food Allergies and Celiac Disease

The FDA identifies nine major food allergens: milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and sesame.^[9] Restaurant foods made after a customer orders are not covered by the same packaged-food allergen labeling rules, and cross-contact can occur through shared equipment, surfaces, oil, utensils, and preparation areas.^[9]

If you have a diagnosed allergy or celiac disease:

- Choose restaurants that can explain their procedures.
- Tell the server clearly that it is an allergy or medical need, not a preference.
- Ask about shared fryers, grills, utensils, sauces, marinades, and preparation areas.
- Do not assume “gluten-friendly,” “dairy-free,” or a menu icon guarantees no cross-contact.
- Carry prescribed emergency medication and follow your emergency plan.
- If the staff cannot answer safely, do not eat the uncertain item.

High Blood Pressure

Calories are not enough. Use the restaurant's sodium data when available, request no added salt, choose fruit or unsalted vegetables, limit sauces and soups, and split large meals. CDC restaurant guidance recommends asking for nutrition information and lower-sodium preparation.^[10]

Diabetes

Follow the carbohydrate plan provided by your clinician or dietitian. Keep carbohydrate portions predictable, include protein and fiber, avoid sugar-sweetened drinks, and check glucose as instructed. Do not use a generic low-carb rule to override medication or insulin planning.

Kidney Disease

Protein, sodium, potassium, phosphorus, and fluid targets can differ substantially by condition and treatment. Do not use the high-protein examples in this book without approval from your kidney-care team.

Vegetarian and Vegan

Anchor the meal with tofu, tempeh, seitan if tolerated, beans, lentils, peas, edamame, eggs, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, or another suitable protein. A vegetable entrée is not automatically protein-rich. Ask what the actual protein source and portion are.

Low-Carbohydrate Plans

Choose grilled protein, nonstarchy vegetables, salad, eggs, seafood, and controlled fats. Ask for sauces on the side and substitute vegetables for starches. If the plan is medically prescribed, follow the clinician's guidance rather than a restaurant rule of thumb.

13. When the Menu Has No Nutrition Information

Independent restaurants, food trucks, specials, and custom orders may not provide exact nutrition data. Use the **P-A-C-E estimate**.

P — Protein

Estimate the cooked protein portion. A palm-size portion is often around 3–5 ounces depending on the person and thickness. Two palms may be appropriate for a larger athlete or a meal carrying most of the day's protein.

A — Added fat

Ask how the food is cooked. Count visible oil, butter, cheese, avocado, nuts, creamy dressing, and sauce as part of the meal. If you cannot know, assume sautéed and restaurant-grilled foods contain more added fat than the same food cooked plainly at home.

C — Carbohydrate

Estimate rice, pasta, potato, bread, tortilla, beans, and dessert separately. Restaurant bowls often contain two or more standard servings. Select the portion that fits the meal's job.

E — Extras

Include appetizers, bites from shared plates, bread, chips, alcohol, sweet drinks, and dessert. Extras count even when they do not arrive on the entrée plate.

Use a Reasonable Range

If tracking, log a range or choose a comparable restaurant entry and add a buffer for oil or sauce. Do not spend twenty minutes hunting for a perfect database match that does not exist. Precision theater does not improve adherence.

When Exactness Really Matters

Exact nutrition information matters more when managing insulin, severe allergies, celiac disease, kidney disease, a narrow sodium limit, or another medical condition. In those cases, choose establishments that publish adequate information or bring a known meal.

14. What to Do After a Higher-Calorie Meal

The post-meal response often determines whether one rich meal remains one meal.

Do This

- Drink water according to thirst and your medical plan.
- Take a comfortable walk if you want movement and it is medically safe.
- Return to your normal breakfast or next planned meal.
- Include protein, produce, and ordinary portions.
- Note what worked and what you would change.
- Expect temporary scale movement after a salty, high-carbohydrate meal.

Do Not Do This

- Skip meals to repay calories.
- Punish yourself with excessive exercise.
- Dehydrate, use laxatives, purge, or take unprescribed products.
- Weigh repeatedly and treat water fluctuation as a verdict.
- Declare the weekend ruined.
- Wait for Monday.

The Three-Question Debrief

1. What decision helped me stay grounded?
2. Where did the unplanned stack begin?
3. What is one adjustment for the next restaurant meal?

Write one sentence for each. Then move on.

The next normal meal is the reset. No punishment is required.

Part V — Put It Into Practice

MISSION BRIEFING

15. The Seven-Day Restaurant Confidence Drill

This is not a seven-day restaurant binge. It is a practice week using menus, planning, and one or more real meals to build skill.

Day 1 — Define the protocol

Write your calorie or portion target, daily protein target, meal protein range, normal carbohydrate strategy, and any medical restrictions.

Day 2 — Audit one favorite restaurant

Find three orders that could fit your goal. Identify the protein, produce, starch, added fat, and extra in each.

Day 3 — Practice the app comparison

Compare a standard combo with an item-by-item build. Record the effect of size, sauce, side, and beverage.

Day 4 — Rehearse the order

Say the order script out loud: entrée, preparation, side, sauce, and drink. Keep it under twenty seconds.

Day 5 — Eat one planned restaurant meal

Use the five-minute pre-order mission. Score the meal using the Five-Point Restaurant Win.

Day 6 — Debrief without judgment

Answer the three debrief questions. Do not change the entire diet because of one meal.

Day 7 — Build the emergency list

Save five reliable orders in your phone: burger shop, chicken shop, Mexican, sandwich shop, and breakfast or coffee shop. Add one convenience-store backup.

Twenty Reliable Orders

These are flexible templates. Confirm current nutrition and allergen information where needed.

1. Grilled chicken salad with colorful vegetables, one rich topping, and dressing on the side.
2. Sirloin, steamed vegetables, and a plain baked potato with butter on the side.
3. Grilled salmon, rice, and vegetables with sauce on the side.
4. Single burger with lettuce, tomato, onion, and mustard; fruit, salad, or small fries.
5. Grilled chicken sandwich with vegetables and a side salad.
6. Burrito bowl with grilled protein, beans, fajita vegetables, salsa, lettuce, and a measured rice portion.
7. Three grilled street tacos with onions, cilantro, salsa, and beans.
8. Chicken fajitas with vegetables; tortillas or rice as the primary starch.
9. Thin-crust pizza with vegetables and protein; one or two slices plus salad.
10. Pasta with tomato sauce and grilled chicken or shrimp; box part of a large portion.
11. Steamed chicken or shrimp with mixed vegetables, rice, and sauce on the side.
12. Beef and broccoli with light sauce and a controlled rice portion.
13. Pho with lean protein, extra vegetables, herbs, and a purposeful noodle portion.
14. Sashimi with rice, edamame, and vegetables.
15. Simple sushi roll plus nigiri and a side salad.
16. Chicken kebab with salad and rice or pita; sauce on the side.
17. Tandoori chicken with vegetables, dal, and measured rice.
18. Vegetable omelet with eggs or egg whites, fruit, and toast.
19. Greek yogurt, fruit, and measured granola plus eggs or a protein shake.
20. Convenience-store meal: ready-to-drink protein shake or Greek yogurt, fruit, and a measured portion of nuts.

The One-Page Eating-Out Card

THE ORDER: Protein anchor + produce + purposeful carbohydrate + controlled added fat + planned extra.

BEFORE

- ✓ Check the menu
- ✓ Pick the meal's job
- ✓ Choose the protein
- ✓ Pre-decide the extra

ORDER

- ✓ Grilled, baked, roasted, steamed, or broiled more often
- ✓ Sauce or dressing on the side
- ✓ Choose one primary starch
- ✓ Water or a planned drink

EAT

- ✓ Assess the portion on arrival
- ✓ Slow down and participate in the meal
- ✓ Pause at comfortable satisfaction
- ✓ Box the rest

AFTER

- ✓ No punishment
- ✓ No skipped meals
- ✓ Use the three-question debrief
- ✓ Return to the normal plan

Restaurant Mission Worksheet

Complete this before the meal when possible. The goal is a clear plan, not a perfect prediction.

Restaurant, date, and meal:

What is this meal's primary job—fat loss, maintenance, performance, social, or recovery?

My calorie or portion range:

My protein anchor and estimated portion:

My vegetables or fruit:

My primary carbohydrate and portion:

Cooking fat, dressing, or sauce plan:

The one extra I care about most:

My beverage:

My portion-control plan:

Five-Point Restaurant Win score: ____ / 5

What worked?

Where did the unplanned stack begin, if anywhere?

One adjustment for next time:

Research Notes and Resources

The guide translates current public-health guidance and restaurant research into a practical decision system. Restaurant recipes, nutrition data, and federal guidance can change. Readers who need exact information should check the current source.

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About the Author

Bryan Healey is the founder of Bryan Healey Fitness and Shred Army. His coaching philosophy emphasizes practical structure, accountability, honest self-assessment, and sustainable action over extreme short-term fixes.

Eat Out. Stay Shredded. was created to help busy adults keep their nutrition plan in the real world—during workdays, travel, family meals, celebrations, and fast-food stops. It is a field guide for consistency, not a demand for perfection.

SHRED ARMY: Order with a plan. Enjoy the meal. Keep the mission moving.