

Enjoy Eating Out Again: 10 Ways to Save at Restaurants

Food prices are on the rise, whether you are buying from the grocery store or your local restaurant. If you are opting for the latter, you can still have a great meal on a budget if you follow these ten tips.

1. Plan ahead. The best way to save money at a restaurant is to plan ahead, and that starts with choosing the right type of restaurant. Buffet style restaurants allow you to get lots of food for a low price. Breakfast and lunch buffets are normally cheaper than dinner buffets. This is also true for regular sit down restaurants. If you eat out for lunch instead of dinner you will automatically save money.
2. Take it home. Opt for takeout venues instead of sit down restaurants. When you pick up your food and eat it at home, you will avoid having to pay a tip. You will also be able to rid yourself of the temptation of ordering dessert, appetizers, or those expensive drinks from the bar.
3. Go light. Plan your meal before you go to the restaurant. Decide exactly what you will order, and skip the appetizers and desserts. These impulse items are the easiest way to spend too much money. Eat a light snack before you leave so that you won't be starving when you get there. You can make safer choices for your budget when you are thinking with your head instead of your stomach.
4. Split it in half. If possible, plan on splitting an entree with your spouse or a friend. Restaurants traditionally serve two to three times as much food as one person should eat. You can save money and still get enough to eat by splitting your meal with someone else. Split an entree and order a side salad each and you will never know that you aren't eating a full restaurant meal.
5. Don't order from the bar. Keep your beverage choices simple. Water is free and available at all restaurants. Leave the soda, coffee and the alcoholic drinks for home. You can buy them cheaper at a grocery store and enjoy them later. For a party of four, you can save nearly \$10 by sticking with water.
6. Skip the appetizers. The only time you should order an appetizer is if the restaurant is offering one for free. If that's the case, take advantage of it, as it will be an opportunity to fill up on free food. This way you will not have to order as much for dinner (or you can take more of it home to enjoy the next day) and you can save money on your total bill.
7. Examine your bill closely. Make sure you are being charged correctly for the items ordered, and make sure that the tip has not been previously added to your total. That said, do make sure not to skimp on the tip. Make sure that you figure your gratuity on what the bill would have been before any discounts or coupons were applied.
8. Watch for coupons and special deals in the newspaper or community newsletters. Many restaurants offer two for one deals or days where kids can eat free. Sometimes restaurants offer dining club cards that give you a certain percentage off your meal each time you visit. If you enjoy going to a particular restaurant, ask about dining club deals or weekly specials.
9. Look online for coupon books specific to your town or city that will allow you to save on local restaurants. If you don't know of a local fundraiser that sells coupon books in your area, try Entertainment.com, which has a field on its home page where you can fill out your United States zip code and see if there is a coupon book for your area. If you eat out a lot, you will be able to pay for the cost of the book in no time as there are typically quite a few coupons in these books that allow you to save as much as 50 percent.
10. If you live in a large metropolitan area, do an online search for discount restaurant gift certificates, as well. Restaurant.com, for example, sells \$25 gift certificates for \$10, and you can sometimes find a coupon code (generally during the last few days of each month) that will allow you to purchase those same \$25 gift certificates for \$4 or \$5.

If you are trying to save money, you don't always have to sacrifice eating out. By planning ahead and looking for opportunities to save, you will be able to enjoy restaurants again. Taking advantage of these money saving deals will allow you to eat out without breaking the bank.

About the Author

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