

Waist-Saving Strategies for Busy Travelers

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You know the routine: you take the family on a weekend getaway, only to find that your clothes are now a bit tighter and your eating habits have definitely taken the low road home. Perhaps your job has you driving all over New England, and lately your backseat resembles a fast food dumpster.

Making healthy food choices on the road can seem an elusive task. Yet whether your lifestyle has you travelling all week for work or you are a self-proclaimed weekend road warrior, there are some easy ways to keep your waistline from taking off every time you do.

The best strategy is to plan ahead for hunger, and to carry an assortment of emergency munchies with you. You can pack them in your briefcase, suitcase, backpack or your car. One woman I know carries around a bag of trail mix in her glove compartment in case she needs to snack on the run.

The real benefit of packing healthy foods ahead of time is that you will be tempted to splurge on foods that can quickly gobble up an entire day's worth of fat and calories. Dried fruit and nuts, fig bars, pumpkin or sunflower seeds, individual cereal boxes, pretzels and granola bars can all be packed well in advance of a trip and will last for months if wrapped in a Ziploc bag or other air-proof packaging. If you pack a small cooler you can take yogurt packs, fresh fruit, vegetable or fruit juices, hard-boiled eggs, turkey sandwiches or lowfat puddings along for the ride.

But what if you are not a planner, or simply don't have the time or energy to pack nutritious foods before you leave? Be a smart cookie on the road by avoiding them at convenience stores and mini-marts. Opt instead for Fig Newtons (low in fat and a good source of fiber), pretzels, whole-wheat crackers or even sports bars. Choosing pretzels and juice instead of potato chips and soda, for example, can save you hundreds of calories, as well as provide added vitamins, minerals and fiber to your day. Soda and chips, on the other hand, provide you with little more than empty calories and unwanted weight gain.

Other whammies to avoid include yogurt-covered raisins or peanuts. Although they are marketed as "healthy" options, a 5oz portion (a mere couple of handfuls) can contain a whopping 600 calories and 120% of your saturated fat budget for the day.

Many convenience stores now carry fresh apples, bananas and oranges, which contain no fat and only about 60 calories per fruit. Sunflower seeds are another smart choice, as 1 oz of dry roasted seeds contains has 165 calories, heart healthy fats and vitamin E. Beef jerky is another winner, as 1 stick (about 2 oz) contains 20 grams of protein and only 1.5 grams of fat. Including a source of lean protein in your meals and snacks (such as tuna, turkey, lean roast beef or beans) is also a good way to keep your energy levels high and hunger pangs at bay while you are on the road.



Smart restaurant choices is the other critical waist-saving strategy for the frequent traveler. In general, restaurant food tends to be higher in fat, calories and salt than food prepared at home. This is due in part to gargantuan portions, as well as to the greater taste appeal of high fat, high salt and high sugar foods.

Below are some tips to help you navigate "life in the fast line", the world of fast foods and restaurant eating:

- Avoid food items that are fried, served au gratin or in a heavy cream sauce; stick to those that are grilled, broiled, boiled or sauteed.
- Skip the bread and butter on the table. Indulging in a roll smeared with butter can add up to 250 calories to your meal.
- Ask for dressings, gravies and condiments (like butter and sour cream) on the side; this can help to cut your calories (and they're usually fat calories) by 25-50 percent.
- Choose clear broth soups or tomato-based soups; avoid cream soups, chowders and bisques.
- Ask the waiter to put half of your entrée in a doggie bag before it is served. This way, you will have lunch or dinner ready for the next day, and built-in portion control.
- Order fresh fruit or sorbet for dessert, or split one dessert between the table.