

DINING OUT

ON THE SOUTH BEACH DIET

You have a busy life. Chances are that work and family keep you on the go, and preparing home-cooked meals may be difficult because of time constraints. Finding a healthy lunch in the middle of a hectic day is often just as hard, and eating a good breakfast at home may be a rare event. In fact, if you're like most Americans, you purchase at least one meal a day at some sort of restaurant.

And that's just on an ordinary day. What about weekends, holidays, special occasions, travel days, business dinners, and all the other times you're away from your own kitchen? Does this mean putting your South Beach Diet on hold?

Not at all.

One of the best things about the South Beach Diet is that it's easy to dine out—and still eat well—while following the principles of the program. No matter what phase you're on, you can continue to lose weight and improve your health, whether you're grabbing a take-out order or enjoying dinner with family, friends, or business associates at a fine restaurant.

The first, and most important, step in sticking to the South Beach Diet when eating out is to keep the following ground rules in mind:

- Choose unprocessed, unrefined carbohydrates, such as whole grains, whole fruits, and fresh vegetables.
- Enjoy plenty of lean protein, such as chicken, fish, certain cuts of meat, low-fat dairy, and reduced-fat cheese.
- Choose foods that are high in good fats, such as fish, avocados, and nuts, and make sure your foods are prepared with healthy oils such as olive oil or canola.

- Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty cuts of beef, bacon, processed meats such as salami, and full-fat cheese.
- Eat plenty of fiber—it's found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, seeds, and whole grains.
- Avoid refined carbohydrates such as white bread, cake, candy, white rice, and other processed foods that are high in sugar and often high in fat as well.
- Avoid added sugar. Choose diet soft drinks, for instance, and watch out for hidden sugars in salad dressings and sauces.

Once you have the ground rules down, you'll also need to master some proven strategies that will help you enjoy your restaurant meals even more.

Key Strategies for Restaurant Dining

Dining out is one of life's pleasures, but it's also a challenge when you're trying to maintain a healthy diet. At home you can control what you put on your plate, but when you eat out, you're bound to come up against some common pitfalls: oversized portions, tempting refined carbs, extra ingredients that add bad fat and bad carbs, and of course menus that don't offer many South Beach Diet-friendly options. The following tips will help you stick to your healthy eating plan.

- **Have a protein snack before you leave the house.** By eating something with protein—a hard-boiled egg or a piece of reduced-fat cheese, for example—about 15 minutes before you arrive at the restaurant, you'll take the edge off your appetite. If

you're not ravenous while you're reading the menu, you'll be able to make better food choices.

- **Banish the bread basket.** And the tortilla chips basket. And the crispy noodle basket. They're all filled with bad (refined) carbs, such as rolls made from white flour or deep-fried tortilla chips. Eating these carbs will give you a glucose jolt that could raise your blood sugar, and you might end up feeling hungrier. If it's okay with your fellow diners, ask your server to remove the basket before you even have a chance to nibble. If not, wait until everyone has taken some and then ask the server to remove the basket. (If that's not appropriate for the group you're with, at least position the basket as far from yourself as possible.) Once you're on Phase 2 or 3, you can indulge in a slice from the bread basket—as long as it is made from whole grains. To prevent a rapid rise in blood sugar, dip the bread into olive oil or even spread a little butter on it. The added calories are offset by the feeling of fullness that the fat adds.

- **Order soup.** If possible, order a cup of soup—the dieter's friend—as soon as you're seated. Look for soups that are rich in vegetables and that aren't cream-based, or order clear broth or consommé. The beauty of soup is that it fills you up, so you're not so hungry when it comes time to order from the rest of the menu. It also sends a message to your brain that you're eating and will be full soon. Since it takes about 20 minutes for that message to travel from your stomach to your brain, by the time your main course arrives, you'll already be on the way to feeling satiated.

- **Ask for extra veggies instead of starches.** Main courses usually come with starchy side dishes, such as white rice or mashed potatoes, which are undesirable foods for South Beach dieters on Phase 1 and 2. Ask instead for extra green vegetables,

such as broccoli or string beans, or for a small green salad. Today, this is a routine request in many restaurants—and your server should be happy to help.

- **Pick healthy cooking methods.** Stay away from anything on the menu that appears to be coated or battered and fried. If the dish comes with a rich butter or cheese sauce, ask for it on the side. Stick to cooking methods—such as roasting, broiling, baking, grilling, steaming, and even sautéing—that don't add bad fats.

- **Have a (nonalcoholic) drink or two.** When your server asks if you want something from the bar, order a glass of water or diet soda. Sip it instead of a mixed drink or beer, and order another to go with your meal. Beyond Phase 1, have a glass of red or white wine along with your food—this is a form of alcohol that's not only acceptable but good for you.

- **Enjoy dessert—within reason.** The South Beach Diet is a lifestyle, and life without dessert would be no fun at all! But you have to make the right choices. Skip high-fat, high-sugar desserts. After Phase 1, if the menu offers fresh fruit, like berries or melon, that's your best choice. If you decide to indulge in something more decadent, use common sense. Ask the server to bring extra forks, limit yourself to three bites, and then share the rest with your fellow diners. After you've been on the South Beach Diet for a while, you may well find that your sweet tooth is more than satisfied with a small portion.

Casual Dining

The average American eats in a chain restaurant specializing in fast food at least once a week. What's wrong with the food at these casual quick-serve restaurants? A lot. Let's start with the fact that the emphasis at most chains is on big, sweet, fat, and

Estimating Portion Size

Portions in restaurants have ballooned over the past couple of decades. Though on the South Beach Diet you should eat until you feel satiated, eating two or three times a normal serving of food means you could be getting a lot more calories, fat, and carbohydrates from your restaurant meal than you realize—and you may keep eating even after you're full simply because it's there. Use these simple tricks to eyeball your portions and get an idea of how oversized they really are:

- 3½ ounces of meat, fish, or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards or a computer mouse.
- 8 ounces of meat, fish, or poultry is roughly the size of a thin paperback book.
- 1 cup of brown rice or whole-wheat pasta is about the size of a tennis ball.
- A small roll is about the size of a small pack of tissues.
- 2 tablespoons of salad dressing is 1 ounce, or $\frac{1}{8}$ of a cup—enough to fill one compartment in an ice-cube tray.

fast. There's no denying that most fast food is typically high in calories, saturated fats (from the meats and cooking oil), trans fats, and refined carbohydrates (from all those buns, pizza crusts, and french fries) and low in fiber (think pickle slice). That means you're getting a faster rise in blood sugar from the bad carbs—one that's not offset by any fiber. The overall effect of this can leave you feeling unsatisfied by your meal. So, while you're still in the restaurant, you end up ordering more food—usually a dessert high in refined carbs and fat—just to feel full. And even if you do feel full, the sensation probably won't last, and you'll be on the lookout for a snack just an hour or two later.

As a South Beach dieter, you obviously know that it's best to avoid quick-serve restaurants whenever possible. We do live in a fast-food world, however, and realistically speaking, you're going to end up in one of these places now and then. Luckily, there are South Beach Diet solutions that will still let you make good choices among the menu options at most chain and family restaurants, whether it's a hamburger, chicken, or pizza restaurant, a cafeteria, or a Mexican eatery.

Hamburger Restaurants

There are more than 12,000 McDonald's restaurants in the United States, over 8,000 Burger Kings, and over 6,000 Wendy's, to say nothing of all the other burger chains. They're everywhere—and that makes them hard to avoid, especially when you're in a hurry. The good news is that today just about all hamburger restaurants have made an effort to accommodate people who are trying to follow a healthy eating plan. Instead of a cheeseburger on a bun with special sauce, you can now easily ask for a bunless burger on a plate, without the sauce and the ketchup. You can even get a side salad instead of those tempting high-fat fries.

What's in Your Fast Food?

Almost all fast-food chain restaurants now provide detailed nutritional information about their food on their Web sites, including calorie counts, amounts of fat and saturated fat, carbohydrates, and fiber; some chains will soon be providing the nutritional information on the packaging. You can usually find out exactly what's in the standard menu items, although "limited-time" and "seasonal" offerings aren't always there. In addition, many of the chain Web sites now offer nutrition calculators that let you put together an imaginary meal and see precisely what it comes out to in terms of nutrients. The next time you get a hankering for a late-night fast-food meal, try using the nutritional calculator first. It will help you make the wisest decision about what to eat when you arrive at the restaurant.

But keep in mind that even a bunless burger is still potentially high in saturated fat and should be avoided if there are better choices available. Fortunately, many burger restaurants now offer meal-size salads topped with grilled chicken or shrimp. If you order one of these, be sure to skip the croutons or Parmesan toasts, and take care with the salad dressings—many are loaded with added sugar. As far as drinks go, avoid the supersized shakes and sugary sodas; choose diet soda, coffee, or water instead.

Chicken Chains

At most quick-serve chicken restaurants, fried chicken is the main attraction. Watch out for all the ways this type of restaurant can try to sell you fried chicken by calling it something else, like crispy, crunchy, coated, nugget, or popcorn. And that's not all that's fried: The chicken is generally accompanied by your choice of french fries, fried onion rings, fried zucchini sticks, or fried mozzarella sticks.

Luckily, at just about all the chicken chains, grilled chicken breasts are now on the menu in one way or another. And some places, like Boston Market, are adding rotisserie chicken to their offerings. You can usually get a grilled chicken Caesar salad or ask for a green salad to go under or with your grilled or rotisserie chicken. At some franchises you can even get a green vegetable such as string beans to round out your meal.

There may be times, however, when you're just stuck with the fried chicken. In that case, simply pull off and discard as much of the coating as you can.

Pizza Places

According to pizza industry sources, the average American eats 46 slices of pizza a year. As a South Beach dieter, you're not in this camp, but you can still occasionally enjoy your pizza if you're on Phase 2 or 3. Just do it the healthier way. Almost all chain pizza restaurants now offer a thin-crust option, which cuts back on the amount of refined carbs you get from a slice. Most also make a veggie pizza, which means you get good vegetables like green peppers and mushrooms while avoiding the saturated fats from pepperoni, sausage, and other full-fat meat toppings (although you could add some grilled chicken if the chain offers it). Keep in mind that even thin-crust pizza has its drawbacks: the high fat content of

the mozzarella cheese (you can ask for less cheese on your order) and the sugar that's sometimes added to the tomato sauce. Some more upscale pizza chains like Uno Chicago Grill now offer sirloin steak and steamed or roasted veggies as menu options.

So order a slice of thin-crust veggie pizza and ask for a side salad—most pizza chains offer them now. But stay away from all the other side offerings, such as chicken wings, breadsticks, cheese sticks, cinnamon sticks, and anything that comes with a dipping sauce.

Mexican Fast Food

Mexican food is perhaps the fastest growing area of fast-food chains. While Mexican dishes do offer a change from hamburgers, when they're prepared American style (which means an abundance of bad fats), they can still be a challenge to South Beach dieters.

A lot of the newer quick-serve Mexican chains are sit-down, and you'll have to immediately pass up the deep-fried tortilla chips that arrive at your table even before you order. At these places and at others like Taco Bell and Del Taco that offer drive-thru, you'll have to resist ordering the tacos, burritos, quesadillas, and chimichangas (deep-fried flour tortillas filled with meat and cheese). That's unless you can get them "bare" or "naked," which means ordering the filling without the flour or corn tortilla. (If you're on Phase 2, a whole-wheat tortilla is allowed.) Best to stick to the grilled items, such as chicken, shrimp, or steak. You can also enjoy the pinto beans and black beans, but skip the fat-laden refried beans and the rice.

The good news is that fresh salsa is a highly acceptable SBD condiment, and guacamole is a great source of good fat from the avocados. Enchilada and tomatillo sauces are also usually okay if they're freshly made and don't have added sugar, but try to stay away from full-fat sour cream and full-fat cheese.

Cafeteria Chains

Cafeteria chains such as Luby's (over 1,300 in Texas) and Piccadilly (which has more than 130 cafeterias in 15 states) have a wide variety of interesting choices that make them good destinations for South Beach dieters on the go. You'll have to watch out for all the usual pitfalls, including deep-fried foods and those tempting home-baked breads and pastries, but you should easily be able to put together a good selection of healthy dishes. Cafeterias usually have extensive salad offerings, a carving station where you can get roasted chicken or turkey breast, side dishes made with fresh vegetables, and daily specials that often feature good SBD choices such as baked fish.

Event Eating

You're at a baseball game, a county fair, a street fair, the circus, or some other event. There are food booths and enticing aromas everywhere. You know the fried dough, cotton candy, and corn dogs are out. What's in? A surprisingly good number of choices.

At fairs, look for grilled chicken, shish kebab in a whole-wheat pita, salads, and vegetable wraps. You might even be able to find a slice of thin-crust veggie pizza. For a snack, try some roasted peanuts.

A ball game just isn't a ball game without a hot dog—if you want one, skip the roll, have the dog on a plate, and stick to just one. Hot dogs are high in saturated fat and often contain fillers made from refined carbohydrates, to say nothing of the chemical additives. At any arena event, like a football game or circus, there's probably a food court you can explore in addition to other food vendors. Many of these venues have finally come to realize that huge numbers of Americans are embracing healthy eating as a way of life, so you might find there are good choices to be had.

At any event, drinks are the easy part. You can always get diet soda, sugar-free lemonade or iced tea, or bottled water. On occasion, a light beer is also okay if you are not on Phase 1.

Travel Meals

Trying to find a good South Beach Diet meal while you're traveling can be a real problem. The typical airport or train terminal consists largely of assorted fast-food restaurants offering mostly burgers and pizza, interspersed with places selling candy, cinnamon buns, frozen yogurt, and other examples of poor nutrition. Today you usually need to bring your own food along on long airplane flights, which means busy travelers end up buying pre-made sandwiches simply for the convenience. On top of that, traveling is stressful—and when you're under stress, you're more vulnerable to temptation.

There are a few strategies that can help you stick to the South Beach Diet even under these circumstances. Before you start your trip, fuel up with a good meal at home. If you're not that hungry when you pass by the cookie stand, you'll be able to avoid temptation more easily. If possible, don't skip meals in order to make better time. You'll regret it later when you get ravenous and end up overeating or eating something you shouldn't. When you know you won't be able to stop for a real meal, bring along some convenient snack foods, such as low-fat string cheese. Or look for a stand selling roasted nuts—just don't buy any of the candy these stands also sell. If you're not on Phase 1 and want a sandwich, ask for whole-wheat bread and a lower-fat filling such as turkey or grilled chicken. Traveling needn't be an excuse to go off the South Beach Diet, but you may need to plan ahead to stay within the guidelines.

Ethnic Restaurants

The wonderful flavors and rich cultural heritage of ethnic cuisines make them a popular option when eating out. With a little knowledge and some flexibility, you can still easily stick to the South Beach Diet while you enjoy the world's great cooking.

American Steakhouses

A thick, juicy steak is about as American as it gets, so in a way steakhouses *are* ethnic cuisine! You can definitely eat at a steakhouse as long as you stick to the leaner beef cuts such as top sirloin or tenderloin. The weight of the steak portion is often on the menu—preferably choose a steak that is 8 ounces or less because of the saturated fat. Elsewhere on the menu, grilled pork chops, chicken, shrimp, and fish are all good alternatives. Appetizers such as green salad or shrimp cocktail are fine, but watch out for the creamy soups and deep-fried appetizers, such as fried mozzarella sticks. The side dishes at steakhouses are often heavy on potatoes in various forms, but sautéed vegetables are also on the menu. Just swap your steak fries or onion rings for some extra broccoli or sautéed spinach.

Chinese Restaurants

Worldwide, Chinese food is one of the most popular ethnic cuisines. Chinese food is often perceived as healthier than other cuisines, and in some ways it is. Authentic Chinese cooking emphasizes fresh ingredients, vegetables, seafood, and light sauces. Many dishes are stir-fried (prepared very quickly in a small amount of oil) or steamed.

Unfortunately, authentic Chinese cooking is hard to find. To accommodate the tastes of their customers, many Chinese res-

Safe Salad Dressings

South Beach dieters eat a lot of salads—they're a delicious, crunchy, filling way to get your veggies and fiber. With the right dressing, salads are also a great way to get the good fats (and extra flavor) that come with olive oil and canola oil. With the wrong dressing, however, a salad could become a source of hidden sugars and bad fats. When choosing your dressing at a restaurant, you're always safe with olive oil and vinegar. You're also likely to be okay if you stick to a small amount of regular ranch, Italian, Caesar, blue cheese, or regular vinaigrette dressing. Avoid Thousand Island, French, Russian, raspberry vinaigrette, and most fat-free dressings; they're all likely to have added sugar (more than 3 grams of sugar in 2 tablespoons).

restaurants serve large portions that are heavy on meat and sauces and light on vegetables.

As with any other menu, you need to choose carefully at a Chinese restaurant. Look for healthy, lower-fat, better-carb choices such as clear soup or any combination of steamed fresh vegetables prepared with small amounts of meat, poultry, or seafood. Avoid steamed white rice, and watch out for the high-calorie, refined-carb, noodle-based entrées such as lo mein,

chow fun, fried rice, and pot stickers (dumplings). Also stay away from anything on the menu that calls itself crispy or sweet-and-sour—these dishes will be deep-fried and/or have added sugar. And just as you would ask your server to take away the bread basket, ask to have the bowl of crispy noodles removed from the table. Finally, be sure to request that your food be prepared without MSG, a flavoring agent often used in Chinese cooking (and in many other prepared foods), and without corn-starch to thicken the sauce.

French Restaurants

It's hard to even know where to begin when talking about the delights of French food—be it the sophisticated cuisine of the great chefs or simple bistro fare. The good news is that French food can fit right in with the South Beach Diet because it's typically prepared with care using the freshest ingredients. When choosing a French restaurant for a meal, go for the simple Mediterranean fare typical of southern France. In this region, olive oil is the basic fat used for sautéing and salad dressings, simply prepared fish and shellfish are the most popular entrées, and fresh vegetables are the usual accompaniment. A classic French specialty, ratatouille, is made with eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, onions, and zucchini and is an ideal South Beach dish. Salade Niçoise (made with tuna) and fish Provençal (made with tomatoes and fresh herbs) are other great SBD choices.

If you're at a French restaurant featuring more elaborate fare, with dishes that have complex sauces made with butter, cream, or cheese, just make the best selections you can and ask for the sauce on the side, if possible. Your server will be able to tell you the ingredients in unfamiliar dishes and suggest substitutions. One classic dish to definitely avoid: *Canard* (duck) à l'*Orange*—

the sauce is sweetened. Ditto for *Canard aux Cerises* (cherries). Also avoid *pommes frites* (french fries) and any other potatoes. Ask for an extra serving of those delicious vegetables instead.

Of course a true French meal isn't complete without wine. By all means, have a glass of wine with your meal, preferably a red such as Beaujolais, Burgundy, or Bordeaux.

Greek and Middle Eastern Restaurants

From a South Beach Diet perspective, Greek and Middle Eastern cuisine is about as healthy as you can get. In countries such as Greece, Lebanon, Israel, and Turkey, the cooking is simple, relying heavily on fresh ingredients and olive oil for flavor. Grilled seafood, lamb, and chicken; whole grains such as bulgur and couscous; beans such as chickpeas; and fresh vegetables, fresh herbs, and feta cheese are all staples.

Some Middle Eastern classics that are fine for South Beach dieters include kibbe (grilled patties of ground lamb and bulgur), souvlaki (marinated lamb grilled on a skewer), hummus (a chickpea dip), and tzatziki (a dip made with cucumber, garlic, and yogurt). Pita bread traditionally accompanies most meals. Try asking for whole-wheat pita, or use vegetables as dippers instead.

As healthy as the food appears, there are still a few dishes to watch out for in a Greek or Middle Eastern restaurant. Pasta, rice, or potatoes are intrinsic to some favorites such as pastitsio (a sort of Greek version of lasagna) and moussaka (a casserole of eggplant, potatoes, and chopped beef or lamb). Both of these dishes also come topped with béchamel sauce, a South Beach Diet no-no since it's made with butter, flour, and whole milk. Rice is often served as a side dish; just ask for more veggies or a salad instead.

Indian Restaurants

India is a very large and very diverse country—and the cuisine is just as wide ranging. Every region has its own style of cooking, from the vegetarian dishes of the South to the lamb-based cuisine of the North, with much in between. Many Indian dishes turn out to be good South Beach Diet choices. A favorite is tandoori, in which meat, poultry, and fish are roasted at very high temperatures inside a clay oven. Other dishes to try without concern include dal (made with lentils and various other kinds of beans), curries (try chana, a chickpea curry), kachumbars (vegetable salads), raitas (salads with a tart yogurt dressing), and masala-style dishes, made with sautéed tomatoes and onions. You may also want to explore other nonmeat dishes made using spinach, eggplant, beans, or whole grains.

As in any ethnic cuisine, there are some Indian foods you should avoid. The list begins with the deep-fried appetizers such as samosas (triangular pastry filled with vegetables) and pakoras (fritters). You will also need to skip the tempting Indian breads, such as puri (puffy, deep-fried flat bread), which are very high in refined carbohydrates. Even breads like nan, which can be made with whole wheat, often have added sugar.

Also stay away from Indian dishes, such as biriyanis, in which the meat, seafood, or vegetables are cooked together with basmati rice. (You'll also have to skip basmati rice as a side dish.) Fiery vindaloos are also a problem. These stews, made with meat, poultry, or seafood, always contain potatoes. In addition, you'll need to skip the dishes made with cream, such as korma or malai.

Italian Restaurants

When you think Italian restaurant, you may think pasta—and immediately you might decide that Italian food isn't a good

Never Say Never

The beauty of the South Beach Diet is that, in the end, no food is off-limits forever. That's what makes dining out on this diet so easy and pleasurable. Once you're on Phase 3, you can occasionally enjoy foods you had to give up on Phases 1 and 2. That's because you've learned to think about food in accordance with principles of the South Beach Diet, and you know that you can be a little indulgent now and then because you're eating healthfully the rest of the time.

There will also be times when everyday life may intrude on your best-laid plans. When dining out with friends, family, or business associates, don't berate yourself if you slip up now and then. Keep in mind that the South Beach Diet is a lifestyle, and if you aren't happy with your choices at one meal, you can simply get back on track at the next one.

choice for a South Beach dieter. But pasta isn't a reason to forgo one of the world's great cuisines. You can easily enjoy a great Italian meal, including some pasta (if you're on Phase 2 or 3), and still stay within your South Beach Diet guidelines.

In Italy, pasta is served in small portions as a preamble to the main dish. Stick to that idea and request whole-wheat pasta with

a simple tomato sauce (stay away from the creamy sauces) and a sprinkle of freshly grated Parmesan cheese. The rest of a good Italian meal is easy for South Beach dieters: salad, fresh vegetables, and grilled or roasted meat, poultry, fish, or shellfish.

There are some things to avoid in Italian restaurants, however. The bread basket tops the list, unless some good whole-grain breads can be found in it. If so, have a small piece, dipping it into extra virgin olive oil instead of slathering on the butter. Other foods to avoid are the salami and other fatty meats and cheeses in the antipasto; rice dishes (risotto); polenta (a type of cornmeal mush); and gnocchi (potato dumplings). Anything breaded and fried (fritti) is out—and that includes calamari (squid) and dishes such as veal Parmesan. Instead, order menu items that aren't battered, such as veal piccata or scaloppine.

Japanese Restaurants

In Japan, food not only tastes great, it looks great. The visual presentation of a dish is as important as its flavor. Because Japanese cooks are very concerned with capturing the essential flavor of a food, that means using only the freshest ingredients and preparing them simply, without elaborate sauces.

Many Japanese dishes are good choices for South Beach dieters. Miso soup makes a great start to a meal. Fish and shellfish are mainstays of Japanese cuisine. You'll have to skip the sushi (raw or cooked seafood or vegetables served on a platform of rice) or have just a piece or two if you're on Phase 2 or 3. You can always enjoy sashimi—slices of raw fish and shellfish served without rice. Most tofu (bean curd) dishes are a good choice, as are vegetable dishes such as edamame (soybeans).

A favorite way to enjoy grilled dishes the Japanese way is *teppanyaki* style—the food is cooked right in front of you on a very

hot grill. Teriyaki-style dishes are also grilled, but the marinade is sweet and contains added sugar—so avoid them. Also stay away from tempura dishes, which are battered and deep-fried. Another Japanese favorite that's a good choice is shabu-shabu, a fondue-style dish where you cook slices of meat and vegetables in broth at your table.

Noodles and rice are the primary starches in Japanese cooking. Most noodles are made from refined grains such as wheat and rice. However, soba noodles (which are made from buckwheat) can be tried in moderation if you're on Phase 2 or 3. Avoid the refined carbs of the white rice by asking for brown rice instead.

Korean Restaurants

One of the lesser-known cuisines, Korean food is a complex and delicious blend of many different culinary influences. Because Korea is a peninsula, the cooking includes many fish and seafood dishes—good choices for your South Beach diet.

A favorite Korean cooking style is bulgogi, or barbecue. Thin slices of beef, poultry, pork, fish, or shellfish are marinated in a fragrant barbecue sauce and then grilled tableside—in many restaurants, you can grill your own. The grilled pieces are wrapped in lettuce leaves before eating. Because the barbecue marinade is typically made with a small amount of sugar or honey and much of it burns off during grilling, you can enjoy this unusual meal without worry—just don't add any additional sauce. Small dishes of pickled vegetables (kimchee) and other small plates of the chef's choosing accompany the meal.

As with all Asian cuisines, noodles and rice are an important part of Korean meals. Skip the noodle dishes, though you could try a small portion of those made with buckwheat noodles, if

you're on Phase 2 or beyond. You should be able to get brown rice instead of white as an accompaniment to a meal, but avoid dishes with *bap* in the name—these are made with white rice. Bimbap, a rice casserole made with pieces of meat, vegetables, and eggs, is a very popular Korean dish—if you're on Phase 3, it's okay to have a taste if someone else orders it.

Mexican Restaurants

Tacos, tortillas, quesadillas, and burritos aren't the only dishes in Mexican cuisine. True Mexican cooking, as opposed to the fast-food version, is full of complex and subtle flavors and has great regional variation. While the basic starches of Mexican cooking—tortillas, rice, and corn in many forms—are high in refined carbs and should be eaten only in limited amounts (and never on Phase 1), there's still plenty on the menu you can enjoy. Look especially for grilled items such as *pollo asado* (grilled chicken) and seafood dishes. Enjoy salads and interesting vegetables such as *ajicama* (a crunchy root vegetable) as side dishes, along with fresh salsa. If you're on Phase 2, it's okay to have a whole-wheat tortilla along with your meal—but stick to just one. And stay away from the deep-fried tortilla chips.

Thai Restaurants

Thai cuisine is growing in popularity, and with good reason. The interesting and sometimes fiery flavor blends of Thai cooking are unusual and delicious. Unfortunately, the favorite menu item in Thai restaurants is *pad thai*, a classic noodle dish made with rice noodles, shrimp, scallions, eggs, pressed bean curd, bean sprouts, and chopped peanuts, all in a slightly sweet sauce. Most other Thai dishes are also based on noodles or rice, and many of the sauces include some added sugar, so you'll have

to be careful. Watch out for anything with coconut milk (regular coconut milk has a lot of saturated fat, and restaurants do not typically use the “light” version), sweet-and-sour sauce, oyster sauce, brown sauce, or garlic sauce. Fish sauce, or nam pla, is the Thai equivalent of soy sauce and is acceptable.

Your best choices are anything that is stir-fried, sautéed, or steamed with herbs such as Thai basil or lemon grass. In the salad part of the menu, look for Thai specialties such as grilled beef salad or a small green papaya salad (if you’re on Phase 2 or 3). Among the entrées, choose dishes that are stir-fried with vegetables, such as chicken pad prik king (chicken with Thai basil, string beans, chile paste, and lime leaves). When ordering stir-fries, ask to have the ingredients stir-fried in broth rather than in garlic or brown sauce. Grilled chicken or beef satés, which come with peanut sauce, are good as well. Among the curry dishes, look for those that do not contain coconut milk, such as country style.

Vietnamese Restaurants

The cuisine of Vietnam is mildly spicy and quite varied. The influences of China, Thailand, India, and France can all be detected in the intriguing dishes of this small country. The primary flavorings are nuoc nam, or fish sauce, and nuoc cham, a spicy dipping sauce made with fish sauce, lime juice, sugar, garlic, and chiles. (Because nuoc cham contains sugar, use only small amounts.) Saté, a paste of peanuts, garlic, and chiles, is often added to stir-fried dishes.

Mild curries are popular in Vietnamese cooking; and the flavors of mint, lemon grass, coriander, ginger, and star anise pervade many dishes. Fresh herbs (or rau thom) are served with just about every meal, along with table salad (or rau song), made with lettuce, cucumbers, bean sprouts, shredded carrots, and other vegetables.

When ordering, you'll have to avoid spring rolls, summer rolls, dumplings, the famous Vietnamese beef noodle soup called pho bo, and all the other dishes that use rice noodles and other noodles. That still leaves some good options. Appetizers featuring ingredients such as beef or seafood wrapped in lettuce leaves are one possibility. Also check the menu for salad selections, which often use delicious ingredients such as green papaya and tamarind in the dressings. You're also well off with grilled, stir-fried, and steamed dishes, shrimp and other seafood, and vegetarian combinations using bean curd.

Enjoy Yourself

Dining out often while sticking to the South Beach Diet may take a bit of adjusting, but if you follow the strategies suggested here, you'll find that you can happily eat just about anywhere, no matter what phase of the diet you're on. The following pages give you many good menu choices in more than 100 restaurants. Whether you're out for fast food or an evening of fine dining, whether you're on Phase 1 or Phase 3, there is always something good for you to eat. You won't feel deprived because you will still be able to eat most of your favorite foods—but in healthier and often more flavorful ways. Moreover, with every meal you order, you'll know you're taking positive steps toward losing weight and improving your health the South Beach Diet way.