



How to Order a Healthy Plant-Based Meal from Any Restaurant Menu

By Dean Ornish, MD, and Anne Ornish
June 11 2019

Editor's Note: For more than four decades, Dr. Dean Ornish has directed revolutionary research proving that lifestyle changes can often reverse the progression of many common, costly, and disabling chronic diseases. His latest book, [Undo It!: How Simple Lifestyle Changes Can Reverse Most Chronic Diseases](#), co-authored with Anne Ornish combines the science with a simple four-part program anyone can follow. This brief excerpt from the book reveals their expert tips for ordering a healthy plant-based (and oil-free) meal from just about any type of restaurant menu.

Tips for Ordering from Any Restaurant Menu

MEXICAN

Make your own tacos, taco salads, tostados, or burritos by ordering a variety of sides:

- Black or pinto beans (ask for no oil or lard)
- Corn tortillas
- Dry-sautéed or steamed vegetables (ask for no oil)
- Seasoned rice (no oil)
- Salsa
- Gazpacho
- Shredded lettuce

STEAK HOUSE

- Baked potato stuffed with steamed broccoli and freshly diced tomatoes
- A dinner salad with nonfat salad dressing, balsamic vinegar, or lemon wedges (you can also bring your own salad dressing in a small container)
- A side of whatever beans are available there, for added protein
- Steamed or roasted vegetables without oil or butter (you can also bring your own favorite sauce from home to top them)
- An oil-free or low-fat tomato/marinara sauce for pasta

ITALIAN

- Salad with nonfat dressing or vinegar (add white beans or chickpeas if available, for protein; ask if not on the menu)
- Minestrone (ask how the soup is prepared and what

the ingredients are)

- Pasta (whole-grain if available): with tomato sauce (no added oil); add tomatoes, garlic, or roasted or steamed vegetables (no added oil); add dried or fresh herbs such as basil if available; add white beans or chickpeas if available; ask if not on the menu
- Vegan pizza (without cheese or oil): Ask if they can just add pizza sauce or tomato sauce; add veggies: mushrooms, tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, spinach, arugula, herbs such as fresh basil; for extra spice and flavor, sprinkle with red pepper flakes

ASIAN

- Miso soup
- Vegan sushi roll (no avocado)
- Vegan spring roll (not fried, in rice paper, no avocado)
- Steamed vegetables and tofu over rice: Ask for steamed, not fried or sautéed in oil; ask if they have brown rice; stay away from oil-based sauces such as sweet-and-sour sauce or black bean sauce; ask for low-sodium soy sauce (unless you're on a sodium-restricted diet)

INDIAN

- Vegetable and tofu curry with steamed rice
- Lentils
- Pair chutney, a delicious condiment, with a curry or lentils
- Roti, chapatti, or naan

Key Questions to Ask When Ordering from a Menu

- How is the menu item prepared?
- Do you use oil, butter, or other added fats?
- Is it baked, fried, steamed, or roasted?
- Can you please prepare this steamed, baked, or dry-roasted?
- What comes with it?
- Are the vegetables prepared with oil or butter?
- Is oil or butter added to the sauce? (Even ask about such sauces as marinara, teriyaki, or black bean sauce.)
- Is oil or butter added to the pasta?

(continued)

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- Is the pasta made with egg?
- Is whole-grain bread available?
- Is brown rice available?
- Is there nonfat salad dressing available, or can you provide balsamic vinegar or a fresh lemon wedge?
- Are soups prepared in a meat, chicken, or seafood stock? Is there cream or milk added? Can you please provide healthy sides such as salad, steamed vegetables, fruit, or a plain baked potato?
- Can you please give me whole-grain bread, brown rice, or wholewheat or corn tortillas instead of their refined white counterparts?

You can also ask if menu items can be prepared differently. Politely ask if the chef could sauté the vegetables using vegetable stock. You could say, “Could I ask the chef to please sauté some mushrooms and chopped tomatoes with garlic and vegetable stock to serve over pasta?” Once your order is taken, kindly ask the server to repeat back his or her understanding of your order—everyone wants the dining experience to go well!

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