

Healthier catering tips for Indian and South Asian restaurants and takeaways

Guidance for Indian and South Asian restaurants and takeaways on providing and promoting healthier food and drink.

Healthier eating is becoming more and more important to customers. Here are some practical catering suggestions to help support your customers with a healthier lifestyle.

You may already be achieving several of these tips but be prepared to go further and make real changes to help your customers make healthier choices.

Portion size

Eating too many calories can lead to obesity, which in turn increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Even small reductions at each meal can make a real difference.

- Give customers wanting smaller portions a choice, in addition to your standard portions try at least one of the following;
 - **offer reduced-size specials** (a container with half the rice and half the meat of a standard portion size)
 - **make small portions** or children's portions available and market these to everyone
- Try not to overfill or compress food into containers. Or try using a slightly smaller container for takeaway dishes. Ask staff to keep to these portion sizes to provide consistency for your customers.
- Consider reducing portion sizes across your menu to a level that is acceptable to customers. If customers are tending to leave food on their plates, this is a clear signal that portion sizes are too large and a smaller size would be acceptable. This could also help reduce the costs of removing waste.

Fats and frying

High-fat foods contain lots of calories, which can lead to weight gain. This in turn can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Reducing saturated fat intake can lower blood cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease.

- **Cook in the tandoor** rather than using the deep fat fryer which will use up oil. For example, tikkas, poppadoms, samosas and marinated paneer can be cooked in the tandoor with the addition of just a little unsaturated oil such as rapeseed or sunflower oil.
- **Avoid frying food more than once.** Par-frying, double or triple cooking and reheating food in oil increases the fat content of the food. Frying snacks like onion bhajis only once will use less oil.
- **Use a healthier oil for frying** like rapeseed or sunflower oil as these contain less saturated fat.
- Try to **use less oil in base curry sauces and drain off any excess fat.** You should aim to have no oily layer floating on the top at the end.
- In dishes like butter chicken and chicken korma use rapeseed or sunflower oil to cook the dish and, if essential, just use a small amount of butter or ghee at the end as these are high in saturated fat. You will get the flavour, gloss and aroma but with less saturated fat.

- Use plain, low fat yogurt in marinades, chutneys, chaat dishes and lassi. You can make yogurt with semi-skimmed or 1% milk or buy low fat yogurt. They will not cost any more than full fat products and this is a simple way to cut saturated fat from the food you serve.
- **Ensure the oil is heated to the correct temperature.** Getting oil to at least 160-165°C if you have a high efficiency fryer, or 175°C if you have a traditional fryer, before you start frying products like pakoras, onion bhajis or chips gives you crisper, more appealing food that absorbs less fat.
- **Bang, shake and drain off any excess fat**, as this can reduce fat absorption by 20%.

Salt

It is important to reduce salt intake as too much salt can lead to high blood pressure and an increased risk of stroke and heart disease.

- **Reduce salt** and salty ingredients in your dishes over time when;
 - frying your spice blend for the base dishes and flavoured rice
 - preparing your dishes for serving
 - making the dough for naan breads
 - cooking rice
- Customers won't notice if you do this gradually. Try adding a little less salt each week until you can avoid adding it all together.
- Consider removing salt from tables and counters and provide to customers on request.
- Check the label and choose pre-made pickles, sauces and condiments that are lower in salt, sugar, fat and saturated fat.

Sugar

Eating too many foods and drinks high in sugar can contribute to excess calories and lead to weight gain, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers. It is also linked to tooth decay.

- **Offer healthier drinks as the default option** such as water, lower fat milks, low calorie or no added sugar drinks, or pure fruit juices (in a 150ml serving size or as close to this volume as possible), rather than sugary drinks.
- If you offer desserts either offer fresh fruit without sugar or syrup, or desserts and pastries that are lower in fat and sugar. Offer smaller portion sizes, or choose desserts or pastries that meet [Public Health England's sugar reduction and calorie or portion size guidelines](#).

Fruit vegetables and fibre

These are low in calories and good sources of vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre. Eating plenty of them will help to promote digestive health and can help prevent heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

- **Add more vegetables and/or pulses** to as many dishes as possible (while not adding more fat, sugar or salt). They are usually cheaper than meat and fish so could save you money and will increase the fibre content of dishes. Try some of the following;
 - experiment with adding more vegetables like peppers to meat dishes and peas or spinach to paneer dishes. This can add texture and colour making them more appealing

- intersperse skewered meat with vegetables like peppers and onions
- serve starters with a plain side salad either without dressings high in fat, sugar and salt or provide a very small portion of dressing
- choose dressings from the sugar reduction and calorie or portion size guidelines
- try adding steamed vegetables to boiled rice to make it more colourful, like peas, sweetcorn, peppers, carrots, green beans or mushrooms with no added salt or oil
- offer half portions of meat dishes with half portions of vegetable dishes as a main meal option
- add or increase the amount of lentils or beans in dishes like soups, stews and rice
- **Offer wholemeal chapatis and brown rice** as an option on your menu.
- **Try offering fruit on your dessert menu**, for example, mango with kulfi or fruit salads with orange, papaya, lychees, mango or pineapple. Offer fruit on your dessert menu or make it part of a meal deal - fruit can be fresh, canned in fruit juice, dried or frozen.

Promote healthier options

Although it is important to improve the nutrient content of all menu items, you can additionally develop promotions to give a unique selling point and encourage customers to pick a healthier meal or snack to eat.

- Train staff to suggest and **promote healthier options with higher fibre and less salt, saturated fat, sugar and calories** if asked for a recommendation.
- **Offer meal deals** or set menus with smaller portion sizes and that feature healthier dishes;
 - swap one or two items on your set menus for healthier options, for example, plain boiled rice rather than flavoured rice or tomato-based main dishes rather than creamy dishes
 - offer a main dish, dhal and a vegetable side with boiled rice, chapatti and a fruit salad dessert for two people
 - include healthier drinks, fruit and vegetable options in menus, all deals and promotions
- Offer desserts lower in fat and sugar, smaller portion sizes, or replace with fruit options. Try to choose those desserts that meet the sugar reduction and calorie or portion size guidelines.
- Avoid serving poppadoms free of charge as these can add a lot of fat and calories to a meal.

Source healthier ingredients and food products from suppliers

[Check the nutrition information](#) about the foods and drinks you buy in and choose options with higher fibre and less salt, sugar and fats. Your supplier may be able to assist you.

Provide energy information

[Calorie Wise](#) is a free scheme in Northern Ireland to help catering businesses display calorie information on menus. This allows customers to have the information they need to make healthier choices when eating out.

The Food Standards Agency provides a free, online tool called [MenuCal](#) which helps businesses to calculate the energy value of food, in both kilojoules and kilocalories. The MenuCal tool also assists businesses to manage allergen information.