Healthier catering tips for Chinese restaurants and takeaways

Guidance for Chinese 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 who want 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.

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.

- Try to limit the number of fried foods on your menu, **offer steamed, boiled or grilled dishes** among your range of starters and main courses. The food will taste great, give customers more choice and you will save money by using less oil. Many restaurants offer starters like grilled dumplings and vegetable soups. Boiled chicken and steamed fish are also proving popular.
- **Avoid frying food more than once.** Par-frying, double or triple cooking and reheating food in oil increases the fat content of the food. If you need to pre-prepare, then try par-boiling meat and chicken first and flash-frying to finish it off.
- **Use healthier oil for frying** like rapeseed or sunflower oil as these contain less saturated fat.
- **Remove the visible fat from pork, beef and lamb and the skin from chicken** wherever possible.
- **For healthier chips, use thick straight-cut chips** (at least a 14mm - just over ½ an inch) and **fry at the correct temperature** (160-165°C if you have a high efficiency fryer or 175°C if you have a traditional fryer).
- **Bang, shake and drain chips**. This can reduce fat absorption by 20% and make them crispier.

- Some customers aren't afraid to ask for what they want but most are too shy to ask for something that isn't on the menu. **Highlight on your menus and train staff to tell customers they can ask for food to be steamed, boiled or grilled instead of fried.** Also consider having these cooking methods as the default option.

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.

- **Check the label** and choose ingredients that are lower in salt and sugar such as soy sauce, stock and ketchup.
- **Reduce ingredients such as salt, MSG, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, oyster sauce, stock or ketchup** in your dishes over time. Customers won't notice if you do this gradually. Try adding a little less each week. Instead, use herbs and spices and other ingredients like garlic and ginger to add flavour. Be careful not to add sugar instead.
- **Consider removing salt and soy sauce from tables** and counters and provide it to customers only on request.
- Avoid adding salt to vegetables, rice and noodles during cooking. Customers won't notice if you do this gradually. Add a little less each week until you can avoid adding it altogether.

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 do 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 dishes** (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.
- **Offer brown rice as an option** on your menu.
- **Try adding steamed vegetables to boiled rice** to make it more colourful and promote this option in your restaurant.
- **Try offering 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.

If you offer meal deals or set menus, this is a great way to get your customers to try healthier dishes.

- **Swap 1 or 2 items on your set menus for healthier options** e.g. boiled rather than fried rice or vegetable soup instead of spring rolls.
- **Include healthier drinks, fruit and vegetable options in menus, all deals and promotions.**
- **Train staff to suggest and promote healthier options with higher fibre and less salt, saturated fat, sugar and calories** if asked for a recommendation.
- **Add a section to your menu highlighting steamed, boiled or grilled options** to help customers identify healthier options.
- **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.
- **Offer meal deals** or set menus with reduced portion sizes.

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.