REAL LIFE

# How to Track Calories When Eating Out (Without Guessing)

Restaurants, takeout and dinner at a friend's place: log it fast, account for the hidden fat, and keep your week on track.

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QUICK ANSWER

To track calories when eating out, check the menu or the restaurant's nutrition info ahead of time if it's available, **photograph your plate before eating** so an AI tracker can estimate it, then **add the extras restaurants use generously**: oil, butter, dressings, sauces and drinks. When in doubt, round portions up. One estimated restaurant meal won't break your progress; skipping the log will.

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## Before you go

- **Look up the menu.** Many chains publish calories online or print them on the menu. Pick your meal while you're not hungry.

- **Save room in your day.** Keep breakfast and lunch lighter and protein-heavy so dinner fits your budget.
- **Decide on drinks in advance.** Two cocktails or a couple of beers can add 300–500 kcal.

## At the table: log it in 30 seconds

**1** **Snap the plate before the first bite**
A quick photo captures the full portion. MealTrack identifies the foods and estimates calories and macros.

**2** **Add what you can't see**
Restaurant kitchens are generous with oil and butter. Add a tablespoon of oil to sautéed or fried dishes, and log sauces and dressings separately.

**3** **Use voice when a photo is awkward**
On a date or at a work dinner? Say it instead: "grilled salmon, mashed potatoes and a glass of red wine."

**4** **Log drinks and dessert as they arrive**
They're the most forgotten entries of any meal out.

## Hidden calories in restaurant food

| Item | Typical serving | About |
|---|---|---|
| **Bread basket with butter** | 2 rolls + butter | 300–400 kcal |
| **Side of fries** | Restaurant portion | 300–500 kcal |
| **Creamy salad dressing** | Small pot (60 ml) | 250–300 kcal |
| **Oil or butter in cooking** | 1–2 tablespoons | 100–240 kcal |
| **Cocktail** | 1 glass | 150–300 kcal |
| **Beer** | 1 pint | 180–250 kcal |

| Item | Typical serving | About |
|---|---|---|
| **Wine** | 175 ml glass | ≈ 150 kcal |

**Ask for it on the side**

Dressing, sauce and gravy on the side lets you decide how much goes on, and makes the portion easy to log.

## Estimate portions with your hand

No scale at the table? Your hand is a portion guide you always have with you:

| Hand guide | Roughly equals | Use it for |
|---|---|---|
| **Palm (size and thickness)** | About 100 g cooked | Meat, fish, tofu |
| **Fist** | 1 cup | Rice, pasta, cereal |
| **Cupped hand** | About ½ cup | Fries, snacks, nuts |
| **Thumb** | 1 tablespoon | Oil, nut butter, dressing |
| **Thumb tip** | 1 teaspoon | Butter, mayo |




**Log restaurant meals in seconds**

Snap it, say it or scan it. MealTrack handles takeout, restaurants and dinner at a friend's place.

Download on the App Store

Get it on Google Play


## After the meal: keep the week on track

One big meal doesn't undo a week of consistent eating. Log it honestly, then go back to your normal targets at the next meal. No skipping meals to compensate.

Think in weeks, not days. If you're 600 kcal over today, eating 100–150 kcal less over the next few days evens it out without making you miserable. Your weekly average weight will tell you if it worked.

## Frequently asked questions

### How do I count calories at a restaurant without nutrition info?

Take a photo before eating and let an AI tracker estimate it, then add cooking oil and sauces separately. Compare portions with your hand (a palm of meat, a fist of rice) and round up rather than down.

### How many calories are in a typical restaurant meal?

It varies widely, but it's often more than people expect. A study of popular meals at US restaurants found an average of about 1,200 kcal per meal, before drinks and dessert.

### Should I skip logging when I eat out?

No. An estimate beats a blank. Unlogged meals are one of the most common reasons a calorie deficit stops working, and even a rough photo log keeps your weekly picture honest.

### What are the lowest-calorie options when eating out?

Grilled or roasted protein, vegetables, broth-based soups and dishes with sauce on the side. Swap fries for salad or vegetables, and drink water, sparkling water or a zero-sugar soda.

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This guide is general information, not medical advice. Calorie and nutrient figures are typical values and estimates. Talk to a doctor or registered dietitian before making big changes to your diet, especially if you are pregnant, under 18, or managing a medical condition.

MealTrack

CHEAT SHEET

# EATING OUT?
# LOG IT RIGHT

Restaurant calories without the guesswork

**≈1,200**
kcal in an average US restaurant meal

**+120**
kcal per tablespoon of oil

**Round up**
when you're not sure

## 1 Check the menu first

Choose before you're hungry.

## 2 Snap before eating

A photo log takes seconds.

## 3 Add oil and butter

1 tablespoon ≈ 100–120 kcal.

## 4 Sauce on the side

A small pot of dressing ≈ 250 kcal.

## 5 Log the drinks

Beer, wine, cocktails: 150–300 kcal each.

## 6 Hand portions

Palm = protein · fist = 1 cup · thumb = 1 tbsp.



**Snap it. Say it. Done.**

MealTrack AI calorie tracker · Free on iPhone & Android

Scan to get the app