



# SLIM-FIT DINING

Eating out can broaden the mind – but, sadly, the waist too. Here, experts give tips on how to dine well at some of London’s top restaurants without inflating your figure

WORDS GEMMA ASKHAM

Why is it that whenever you find something you love, there’s always a killjoy telling you not to indulge? Now the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* is on the list of offenders, having published a study revealing that a meal eaten out has an average 200 more calories than a home-cooked dinner. Granted, the damage isn’t KFC bucket-grade. But dine too well, too often, and an uncomfortable pinch at your waistband can result. “Many people eat out with the strapline in their heads of, ‘It’s out of my control, what the heck.’ This ‘what the heck’ leads to over-consumption,” explains registered dietician Laura Clark (lecnutrition.co.uk). But, she reassures us: “A delicious meal doesn’t have to undo all your healthier efforts in the day.” And, yes, we’re talking something infinitely more satisfying than a side salad and a stomach rumble.

## PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... JAPANESE

Japanese cuisine’s Achilles heel may be sushi rice – which includes sugar and rice vinegar – but Clark warns against avoiding all white rice. “White rice [will] release into the bloodstream more quickly than wholegrain, and lacks the minerals and fibre, but that’s not to say it’s bad for you,” she explains. The most important rice rule is quantity in relation to the rest of the meal. “A massive bowl of rice with a couple of prawns and limited veg is not great. But a fist-sized dome with a decent handful of prawns and plenty of crunch will regulate blood-sugar levels and insulin release.”

## What to order at Nobu

Pass on the tempura, which triggers Clark’s fried-food alarm. “Go for prawns (full of zinc for immunity), shrimps or black cod, or salmon dishes for omega 3s.” Sauce-wise, garlic and miso are low in fat – but even sugary sauces, such as teriyaki (in moderation) won’t derail you.

## PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... STEAK

Saturated fat is hard to avoid for steak-lovers. For all the talk of steak’s protein punch, the average rib-eye has 37g of fat – 15g of which is the cholesterol-forming,

heart-stopping kind. The positive? Saturated fat is primarily located in the strips that you can (read: should) cut off. Fillet – the healthiest cut – has virtually no fat, and sirloin, the next leanest, contains only around 2g of the saturated stuff. You should eat your meat early. “Steak takes a while to digest; too late in the day and it could disturb your sleep pattern,” confirms James Crossley, founder of Chelsea Fitness (chelseafitness.co.uk).

## What to order at Hawksmoor

To start, smoked salmon. “A great source of protein and rich in omega and B vitamins”, says Crossley. For main, the 300g fillet steak. “This is a lean cut with 60-70g protein. Have it with English

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Frida Harju

greens – ask for no butter – and baked sweet potato, which has more fibre and vitamin A than white potatoes.”

## PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... MODERN EUROPEAN

Unhealthy add-ons are the culprits in modern European restaurants. “The small things the chef sprinkles over your dish – Parmesan, breadcrumbs, fried bacon, cheese crisps – are deceptively calorific,” admits Frida Harju, nutritionist at Lifesum health and fitness app (lifesum.com).



GRILLED WAGYU BEEF AT HAKKASAN  
LEFT: HAKKASAN  
RIGHT: CECCONI'S  
BELOW: POLLEN STREET SOCIAL



“Unless you ask for plain steamed rice, most rice dishes will be cooked in fat” Azmina Govindji

Avoid such dishes or ask for them on the side to choose how much you have. Good additions, however, are garlic and chilli. “Capsaicin, the component that gives spices their ‘kick’, increases satiety, decreases cravings for sweet and fatty foods, and it’s thought the heat produced makes our metabolism work quicker.” Also, pick a starter with at least 50% vegetables. “You might not want a few salad leaves for your main, but the University of Pennsylvania found starters that were at least half made up of vegetables increased ‘fullness’ enough to prevent overeating later in the meal.”

**What to order at Pollen Street Social**

Harju commends the restaurant’s abundance of “lean protein sources”. Her pick of the starters is the ‘Fruits of the British Sea’, which features Orkney sea scallop, pickled radish and jalapeño, and Beluga caviar. Follow this with the roasted red-legged partridge with mulled spiced beetroots: “few fried ingredients, and not too many sweet things.”

**PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... INDIAN**

Nutritionist and dietician Azmina Govindji (azminanutrition.com) warns not to overlook *how* food is cooked, not simply what’s in it. “Unless you ask for plain steamed rice, most rice dishes will be cooked in fat. Even a baked poppadom

is around 60% fat.” The good news is there’s a lot that’s healthy. “Dhal dishes are packed with fibre and protein; breads such as tandoori roti or chapati have coarse wholemeal flour, again, for fibre. Salads are usually plain or dressed in fresh lemon juice.” Govindji continues: “Tandoor dishes – typically marinated in yoghurt, tomato and spices, then roasted in a hot clay oven – are your best friends.”

**What to order at Gymkhana**

Anything containing palak (spinach), gobi (cauliflower), chana (chickpeas) and makai (corn) – plus the kachumber salad and raita. For Govindji, healthy standouts include: dosa with Chettinad duck; aloo tikki chat (as long as you avoid the deep-fried sev); lasooni wild tiger prawns; tandoori gobi; gilafi quail seekh kebab; makai palak; and dhal lasooni.

**PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... ITALIAN**

Italian food: delicious, yet home to that oft-vilified protagonist – the carbohydrate. But are the haters right? Jackie Lynch,

registered nutritional therapist and author of *The Right Bite: Smart Food Choices for Eating on the Go* believes there is a silver lining for exercise. “Carbohydrates provide energy for your workout,” she explains. “But if you’re not being physically active [enough], your body stores excess calories from carbohydrates as fat cells.” Lynch recommends eating pasta at lunchtime to give your body more time to process the carbohydrates. Interestingly, the much maligned ‘carb bloat’ may be caused by stress levels. “Wheat can be an irritant to a sensitive digestion. At times of stress, our digestion slows down, contributing to bloating and discomfort.” If you’re under pressure, keep wheat to a minimum.

**What to order at Cecconi’s**

For starter: borlotti, cannellini and chickpea soup (“full of soluble fibre”). For main: scialatielli, Sicilian red prawns, zucchini (“low in calories and fat, and full of protein, prawns are a great heart-healthy option that’s rich in antioxidants, such as selenium”). And add a side of broccoli, “high in vitamins C, B, and K, which support immune, cardiac and bone health”.

**PHYSIQUE-FRIENDLY... CHINESE**

Restaurant Chinese food may be a step up from a takeaway, but there are still stumbling blocks. Take salt: “hoisin, soy and fish sauces all have a high salt content,” explains nutritional therapist Eleanor Strang (eleanorstrangnutrition.co.uk). “But,” she continues, “what surprises many people is that piling your plate with rice and noodles is really bad for you. It spikes your blood glucose, and when blood glucose rises quickly, the body

**10 FOOD HABITS OF THE FITTEST DINERS**

**SWEAT BEFORE STOMACH**  
“Counter a rich evening meal with prior activity. People who perform physical activity during their lunch hour or pre-working day actually find themselves craving a larger lunch over a huge dinner,” notes David Howatson, master trainer at Technogym.

**BUT DON’T SKIP LUNCH**  
“The calorie-saving often backfires as over-hunger leads to over-indulgence... your body then craves energy at the end of the day,” says dietician Laura Clark.

**TRACK YOUR APP-ETITE**  
Download the Mywellness app (mywellness.com) and use the ‘MOVES’ tracker. “Pay particular attention to the days you head out for a meal,” advises Howatson.

**GET A WINDOW SEAT**  
Researchers from Cornell University found diners who sat farthest away from the door, or in dark corners, ate more. It’s thought to be because they couldn’t see their food so well, and weren’t distracted by action elsewhere.

**BUT AVOID THE SERVING AREA**  
“Where you’ll see food constantly,” notes Clark.

**EAT YOUR GREENS – FIRST**  
“Eat a side salad before your main meal and the high fibre content will fill you up, reducing the

likelihood that you’ll eat all of your main meal or opt for dessert,” explains health coach and NLP practitioner, Uxshely Chotai (justsensiblehealth.com).

**BE THE CONVERSATION STARTER**  
The more you talk, the slower you’ll eat. “And slower eating speeds have been shown to lower energy intake,” confirms Chotai. “Eating slowly affects the body’s appetite-regulating gut hormones, meaning people feel fuller after eating less food.”

**POP A MINT**  
“Signal to yourself that you’re done with dinner by eating a mint. It will prevent you from picking at your food when you’re already done,” explains Harju.

**FOLLOW THE 20-MINUTE RULE**  
Wait 20 minutes before ordering dessert. “By that time, hunger hormones will have risen in your bloodstream and should be kicking in to your appetite centre to tell you that you’re full,” says Clark.

**BEAT THE SUGAR TRAP**  
“Restaurant dining tends to involve a high sugar content,” says Howatson. “Follow a mixture of long, slow, distance fat-burning, such as running, rowing or cycling – plus resistance work with a high metabolic demand (squats, deadlifts, and high-intensity interval training) – to fight against the sugar intake.”



turns it into fat to store in the liver and around the waist.” As well as shunning sweet and sour dishes – obvious sugar pits – avoid anything described as ‘crispy’.

**What to order at Hakkasan**  
Don’t let the above deter you: Strang assures us that Hakkasan’s menu is overwhelmingly healthy. “The hot and sour soup will wake up the digestive system without being filling or too

caloric, or try the Alaskan king crab and sea bass soup for omega-3 fatty acids.” For mains, look for dishes with a high vegetable content, such as the stir-fry lotus root. Strang’s only reservation is the dim sum platter. “Wraps and dumplings are made of refined starch; low in nutrients but high in carbohydrate, they fill you up and raise blood-sugar levels.” Keep your water intake high, too, to counteract any salty sauces. Lecture over.