

A Strategy for Buffet Eating

From the American Institute for Cancer Research

Q: Buffets are a challenge for me – I always seem to overeat and end up feeling overloaded. Are there tips to make this easier?

A: Buffets are a challenge for many people. Fortunately, we can make healthy choices without resorting to a restrictive mindset that takes the enjoyment out of the occasion. We often equate eating with getting “more for our money” at a restaurant or an obligatory politeness at a social gathering. Reframe your thinking: consider the variety of foods as a delightful chance to choose what you want, not a requirement to gorge yourself. One tip for limiting amounts is to choose a salad-sized plate rather than a large dinner plate. Then, instead of just proceeding down the buffet line, filling your plate as you go, look over the whole range of selections and decide which dishes appeal to you most. If you see lots of not-so-healthy, rich foods, choose just one or two that you’d like to savor on this occasion. If you want to sample many foods, put just a few bites of different selections on your plate. Be focused, because this kind of nibbling tends to involve more food than a typical meal. On the other hand, if you find tiny tastes frustrating, be more selective about how many different dishes you sample, and make portions about one-quarter to one-third of normal. Your plate should not be heaped sky-high as you walk away from the buffet table.

Remind yourself this is not likely to be the last time you ever see these foods. Add other foods that will create a healthful, hunger-satisfying meal. Include a source of protein (poultry, fish, meat, cheese, beans, eggs, tofu), keeping the animal protein to one-third or less of your plate. Balance this with at least two-thirds of your plate holding vegetables, fruits and grains (ideally whole grains).

Finally, rather than automatically going back for more, give yourself a few minutes to consider whether you are truly hungry. Once you’re home, will you really say, “I only wish I’d eaten more?” Overall think of a buffet as a way to sample a variety of foods as just one part of what makes the occasion enjoyable.

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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field, and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is part of the global network of charities that are dedicated to the prevention of cancer. The WCRF global network is led and unified by WCRF International, a membership association which operates as the umbrella organization for the network. The other charities in the WCRF network are World Cancer Research Fund in the UK (www.wcrf-uk.org); Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands (www.wcrf-nl.org); World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (www.wcrf-hk.org); and Fonds Mondial de Recherche contre le Cancer in France (www.fmrc.fr).