ETHNIC FOOD CHOICES—HEALTHFUL WITH PLANNING

Texans are finding many more healthful ethnic foods says ____________________, ________________ County Extension agent in Family and Consumer Sciences. In most urban areas, and increasingly even in smaller towns, people eating out can choose from among an array of restaurants that offer more exotic foreign flavors from Asian, Thai and Indian foods to the most common Chinese and Mexican specialties. But from a health perspective, can one find some ethnic food choices that are better choices nutritionally -- nutrient-dense, lowfat, high-fiber, and rich in phytochemicals. The solution to eating healthfully is to satisfy the taste buds and the body’s nutritional needs at the same time. Choose carefully from among the temptations using the same common sense guidelines before selecting your choices whether you are eating out in a fast food or restaurant or at home and/or preparing foods for your family.

PORTION CONTROL
Beware of serving sizes and use portion control in restaurants. But portions, says registered dietitian Dr. Mary Bielamowicz, Regents Fellow, Professor and Nutrition Specialist, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A&M University System, are things that people choose themselves from whatever food selections are possible, so they can be controlled even when the restaurant has gone overboard. When you know and understand what makes a good portion size of different foods, she explains, you can eat foods in any restaurant and maintain their nutritional standards.

AVOID HIGH-FAT FOODS
Many ethnic foods as well as traditional favorites are high in fat, but most cuisines offer enough choices so that consumers can avoid high-fat items—thus opting for more healthful choices. Consumers can request that meat or poultry be broiled or baked rather than fried or sautéed. Instead of the Texas favorites—chicken-fried steak or chicken, try vegetable-rice-bean combinations or vegetable salads with grilled meats. No bad foods exist, but the manner of preparation makes the big difference. If consumers make choices that focus on how the food is prepared, they will naturally select more wisely from many food choices. Instead of high fat sauces and glazes, ask for the sauce or dressing on the side to avoid adding hundreds of calories and very high quantities of fat.

PLANNING FOR INDULGENCES
Many healthful choices with occasional desserts in restaurants are possible if you plan for eating out. If you know that tonight you’re going to go out for Mexican, Soul, Middle Eastern or Chinese food with your friends, throughout the day you might go light on some of the carbohydrates and avoid fat-laden choices so you’re not overloading yourself for the day. Keep in mind the day’s total calories. The foods of each culture have their own distinct tastes and their nutritional pros and cons so select carefully from menu choices.