

Living a Better Life
(featured column... from the editor's desk)

Saving Money on Restaurants and Fast Food
by Michelle Jones

With a family of 6, eating out can often cause some serious damage to our budget. But over the years, we've learned lots of little tricks to save money while eating out and I thought they might be helpful for you too.

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First thing, WATER!

If money is really tight or you're on a mission to be as frugal as possible, order water for everyone. And when your family starts to complain, just remind everyone "water is good for you!"

On those days when you really want to have something to drink besides water, try ordering one large tea or soda, and share... yes, I said share. I hate to admit it but this is what we do quite regularly. We don't even notice the stares any more, really!

Occasionally

The comparison between them and our large family is something I should never even consider, but I just have to laugh when I realize we're splitting a large coke, for 6. But hey, we are saving money!

Okay, okay, if this completely grosses you out, then just use my first tip for ordering water, you will still save a fortune over a year's time!

Restaurants

One of my favorite ways to save money at restaurants, and get the most delicious meal for my money, is to order just a salad (or appetizer), and dessert. Forget the main course, that's the most expensive part, and if you order one you won't even have room for dessert, low-fat of course! ;o) Seriously though, this is a fun way to save money and you'll be saving on calories too. And by lowering your total bill, your 15-20% tip will be less too, so that's more money saved.

Fast Food

This one is confusing for me at times, when we're rushed and on the go between baseball games and other activities, it's hard to remember exactly which place is the cheapest and what I'm supposed to order to get the cheapest meal.

Sometimes I can feed most of us for under \$6.00, and sometimes it can cost \$15.00 or more. Those \$15.00 trips are the ones I try most to avoid.

I should make myself a list, of exactly when and how I've gotten the best deals, but for now I'll try to recall a few of them for you.

Taco Bell is a good one, we can order tacos for everyone and share two large drinks, for under \$10.00. But the best deal I got was when there was just 4 of us. I ordered the combo meal that had a chalupa and two tacos, and then ordered one extra taco. The cost was around \$5.00!

Another great deal is the two cheeseburger combo at Burger King, or is it McDonald's? I'm not sure, but you can look for it. And I think it's Wendy's that has chicken nuggets for .99 cents, and instead of ordering happy meals for all the kids, you could get those and then share a large drink and fries for everyone... saving at least \$1.00 per person. I know it doesn't seem like much, but the savings add up quick, believe me!

The Main Point

Wherever you eat out, the most expensive thing you want to avoid (except on special occasions), is to order everyone their own full meal. Cut back, combine, and share whatever you can.

When eating out on your own, you can save money by ordering just the sandwich and water, skipping the fries. The combo meals are your next best bet, but then you add another \$1.00 or more to your order and about 2,000 calories, depending on what you get.

And for those of you that are thinking, "gosh, I can't even afford a \$5.00 meal out right now," we've been there too. The great thing is, the money-saving tricks you are learning now, when you don't have any extra spending money, will help you save money in the future, when times are better and you do. :o)

God bless,
Michelle

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