

# Menu secrets

*When dining out, two things that affect your menu choices the most are what you see on the menu and how you imagine it will taste.*

But what you order may have less to do with what you want and more to do with a menu's layout and descriptions, according to a Cornell study in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

**First**, any food item that attracts attention (with bold, highlighted or colored font or set apart in a text box) makes us more likely to order that food item rather than the item listed next to it. "In most cases, these are the least healthy items on the menu," said lead author, Brian Wansink, author of *Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*.

**Second**, menu names with descriptive items sell better and lead you to believe that they taste better. The researchers cite a study where they changed the names of restaurant menu items to make them more descriptive; the seafood filet became Succulent Italian Seafood Filet and red beans and rice became Cajun Red Beans and Rice. Sales of these items went up by 28%, and they were rated as tastier, even though the recipe was identical. Diners were also willing to pay an average of 12% more money for a menu item with a descriptive name.



## The best solution

to healthier restaurant dining may be an easy one. "Just ask your server," said Wansink, "Ask, 'What are your two or three lighter entrées that get the most compliments?' or 'What's the best thing on the menu if a person wants a light dinner?'"



## Eating Out Tip

Before you choose restaurants, check out their websites. Read menu options and nutrition information, if provided, to help you make healthy choices. When you are at a restaurant, ask if you can make healthier substitutes, such as having a vegetable in place of French fries.