


Heavy Dining

- 1 The calorie content of meals in UK restaurants is 'excessive' and sit-down restaurants are healthier than fast-food chains, recent research suggests. The research team looked at more than 13,500 meals on the menus of 21 sit-down restaurants and six fast-food chains.
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- 2 The study relied on information provided online by restaurant chains on calorie content. Only one in 10 meals was classed as healthy or fewer than 600kcal, as recommended by Public Health England. And nearly half of the meals contained 1,000kcal or more. Sit-down restaurants were five times more likely to offer high-calorie meals of 1,000kcal or more than fast-food restaurants, the research found.
 - 3 Dr Eric Robinson, lead researcher from Liverpool's department of psychological science, said the results were 'shocking' but the number of calories consumed in restaurants is probably even larger than we assume now. "Plate clearing' is a common behaviour. Also, our analysis did not include drinks, starters, desserts or side orders."
 - 4 Burger meals in sit-down restaurants contained an average of 414kcal more than burger meals in fast-food chains, while salad meals in restaurants were slightly higher in calories on average than fast food salads. Dr Robinson said portion size, the ingredients used and cooking methods could explain the difference, but he said the food industry had to make changes. "It's really clear what the food industry need to do. They put the food on the plates. They need to 11 and reduce the number of calories that they're serving." The government is currently consulting on a plan to introduce mandatory calorie labelling in restaurants, takeaways and cafes, which is likely to be ready in the new year.
 - 5 Kate Nicholls, chief executive of trade association UKHospitality, said restaurants, pubs and other hospitality businesses were already taking action to reduce calories and offer healthier dishes – but there were costs to consider too. "Proposals to shrink the size of dishes or cap calories would be yet another burden for hard-pressed operators to absorb, resulting in prices going up and investment in businesses going down; inevitably negatively impacting the overall customer experience."

- 6 Dr Robinson said research showed that meals eaten in a restaurant contained more calories and with more people having restaurant food delivered to their homes using online services, the problem could be getting worse. He added, however, that the fast-food sector was now offering more lower-energy meals and healthier options, after pressure from campaigners to do so.

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