

Chapter 10: Dining Out and Other Tips



Eating out and following a restricted diet may seem like two things that do not go well together. But dining out with PKU can be enjoyable and easy if you take the time to prepare in advance.

Working with Restaurants

Form a Relationship

If you have a local restaurant you go to often and really enjoy, get to know the management and staff. Many times, people in the food business also want to get to know their clientele and understand their special diets. If you speak openly about having PKU, you may be surprised to learn that the owner has a cousin or a family member with similar dietary restrictions. A restaurant may have no problem with changing or modifying a menu item to meet your needs. They may even let you bring your own low protein bread or pasta for them to prepare to enhance your dining experience⁷³.

Ask Questions

Don't be shy! Ask your waiter or waitress questions about ingredients used. Tell them that you need to limit protein. Remember that it is their job to make your dining experience as pleasurable as possible. They should be able to inform you of all ingredients (and especially hidden ingredients) in your desired dish. If they do not know the answer or seem unsure, politely ask them to consult the chef since accurate information is important to your special diet⁷⁴.

Watch Out for Hidden Ingredients

In the chart on the right are some items that contain protein due to a hidden ingredient that makes up the final product. If you are not 100% sure, you may want to ask the server if these hidden ingredients are present. Stating that you have a 'food allergy', which is a common occurrence, will assure an accurate answer⁷⁵.

To create a positive dining out experience:

- *Research the type of restaurant where you will be dining.*
- *Gain knowledge of menu options prior to your arrival. Many restaurants have menus online.*
- *Feel free to call ahead with a question about what is available. Be clear about your dietary needs.*
- *Some places may allow you to bring in your own low protein pasta or bread.*

Menu Item	Hidden Ingredient
Worcestershire Sauce	→ Anchovies
Miso Paste	→ Soybeans
Tahini Sauce	→ Sesame Seeds
Caesar Salad Dressing	→ Anchovies
Soup Broth & Gravies	→ Chicken & Meat
Soy Sauce	→ Soybeans

⁷³Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:35

⁷⁴Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:32

⁷⁵Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:32

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Create Your Own Dish

A good restaurant is a customer-friendly restaurant. Since you are free to ask questions, request a custom entrée that is suitable for your diet. If they have the ingredients in house, they may be able to make you something not on the menu. Chefs are food professionals and may enjoy the chance to be a bit more creative and make a special low protein entrée⁷⁶.

Request Sauces and/or Gravies on the Side

If you are not sure about a sauce or topping, request that item on the side. Sometimes a little bit of sauce, gravy, and/or dressing can go a long way. Since you need some phenylalanine in your diet, a small amount of a “High-Phe” item can allow you to enjoy the flavor or theme of a dish. Remember you still must keep track and control the amount of Phe you take in⁴.

Suggestions When Dining Out

Dining out is a wonderful social experience. Following a restricted diet does not mean you must avoid the experience of dining out. Choosing a place to dine, with PKU, just requires a little advanced planning⁷⁷. Many restaurants provide their customers with special dietary needs with resources. Check the internet before going to see if the restaurant you’re visiting has information for PKU customers.

Types of Restaurants to Try

Note that the Phe content listed below may change. Please use this only as a general guide and check with the restaurant at the time of your visit.

American

Visiting your local diner or other establishments offering typical American fare may offer the most menu variety and ease of ordering.

Try: baked potato, coleslaw, mixed vegetables

Boston Market

1 serving green beans.....	1.6 g protein / 46 Phe
1 serving coleslaw.....	1.8 g protein / 39 Phe
1 serving cinnamon apples.....	0.4 g protein / 15 Phe

Vegetarian

Adhering to the PKU diet is similar to being a vegetarian, but there are key differences. Many traditional vegetarian items are rich in cheese and/or soy products. These items are high in phenylalanine and natural protein, therefore, not a part of the PKU diet plan. Typical vegetarian items to watch out for and avoid include cheese, tofu, and other soy products⁷⁸.

⁷⁶Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:32

⁷⁷Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:36

⁷⁸Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:35

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A vegetarian restaurant can be a new and exciting place for you to dine. Be sure to ask your server about what dishes would be most suitable for the PKU diet. Vegetarian protein is soy based and very high in Phe. Be sure to ask questions. Here you may find your server to be very knowledgeable about the food and ingredients and your dietary needs⁷⁹.

Try: *Stir fried green beans or eggplant, mixed steamed vegetables*

Au Bon Pain

12 oz carrot ginger soup 1 g protein / 56 Phe
12 oz garden vegetable soup..... 3 g protein / 89 Phe

Buffets

Buffets can be an ideal dining situation for anyone with PKU. You can select from a variety of healthy choices and customize them to fit your needs in controllable portions. Even the most diligent person following a PKU diet can overindulge at a buffet, so be careful. Buffets are an all-you-care to eat, not an all-you-can-eat environment⁸⁰.

Try: *theme salad, fruit , mashed potatoes*

Old Country Buffet

1 serving spoon sautéed zucchini1 g protein
1 serving spoon candied yams1 g protein
1 serving spoon grilled vegetables1 g protein

Mexican

Bring your own low protein tortilla, or order a corn tortilla to enjoy at a Mexican restaurant to enjoy a variety of tasty food! The different toppings like lettuce, tomato, salsa, sautéed greens, guacamole and even a little bit of sour cream can be a nice change.

Try: *vegetable fajitas with low protein or corn tortilla or Spanish rice*

Chipotle

1 crispy taco shell1 g protein
1 soft taco shell 1.5 protein
2.5 oz fajita vegetables1 g protein
3.5 oz guacamole.....2 g protein
1 serving fresh tomato/green tomatillo salsa1 g protein

⁷⁸Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:35

⁷⁹Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:36

⁸⁰ Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:36

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Japanese

Japanese restaurants tend to prepare fresh entrees to order and have an abundant selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. This can allow for a great dining out adventure. Many menu items are naturally low in phenylalanine, and they may provide a good chance to try something new. Be creative and talk to your server⁸¹.

Italian

Italian restaurants are abundant. Optimize your dining experience by asking questions and making special requests. Italian dishes often have a lot of sauce and cheese so ask for them on the side. Bringing your own low protein pasta and/or bread may increase your menu choices⁸².

Try: vegetable based sushi rolls: cucumber, avocado, mushroom, squash

Souplantation & Sweet Tomatoes

½ cup carrot/raisin salad.....	1 g protein
½ cup pineapple/coconut salad.....	1 g protein
½ cup steamed veggies with lemon butter.....	1 g protein

Chinese

Take out or eat in, Chinese restaurants are known for using a variety of fresh vegetables and cooking food to order. There are many options that will fit into the PKU diet. Be sure to ask about the ingredients in the sauce to rule out hidden Phe in a soy or meat-based sauce. Requesting a light sauce or sauce on the side can increase options and the size of your portion⁸³.

Try: low protein pasta with broccoli/garlic oil, cold grilled vegetable antipasto, vegetable du jour vegetables

Panda Express

Side of mixed veggies.....	2 g protein / 80 Phe
1 serving mandarin/sweet & sour sauce.....	0.1 g protein / 3 Phe
1 fortune cookie.....	1 g protein / 25 Phe

To feel more satisfied with your dining out experience:

- Drink a serving of your formula before going out - the Phe free protein in your formula helps with satiety or making you "feel full".
- Eat a low protein snack such as fruit, vegetables, low protein bread or low protein crackers.
- Drink plenty of fluids before going out and while you are at the restaurant.

⁸¹Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:37.

⁸²Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:38.

⁸³Maltzman, S. : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey: Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:38.

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Beverages

Whenever you go to a restaurant, you will have something to drink. Many may choose only to have water with their meal, but many people choose something else. By now you probably know that regular soft drinks are Phe free – but don't forget they are not calorie free. Make sure you drink these in moderation.

Also look for the soft drinks that are sweetened with Splenda (sucralose) which is a phe free sweetener. Coke sweetened with Splenda, Pepsi One and Diet Rite in all flavors are diet soft drinks that are sweetened with Splenda.

Coffee/Tea

Many people enjoy drinking coffee at home and at restaurants and coffee shops. Most places have low Phe options such as regular coffee, tea, apple cider and fruit juices. Be aware of what is added to drinks such as milk, soy milk, half and half, cream. These will add Phe to the beverage.

While many of the flavor syrups are Phe free, be aware that some of the sugar free syrups are sweetened with aspartame, but some are sweetened with Splenda (sucralose) which is Phe free. Always ask before adding anything to your drink.

*Alcohol*⁸⁴

Some beer and mixers contain significant amounts of phenylalanine. If you choose to consume these types of beverages you need to account for this in your total allotment of phenylalanine for the day. Both alcohol consumption and high phenylalanine levels impair your judgment. Even if you choose alcoholic beverages that are low in phenylalanine, impaired judgment can lead to poor food choices and overeating resulting in elevated blood phenylalanine levels. Moderation is the key.

How much Phe is in beer?

One 12 fl oz can of beer = about 40mg of Phe! (The darker the beer the higher the Phe.)

For Phe content in other alcoholic beverages, look in the low protein food list for PKU.

⁸⁴Maltzman, S, : *My PKU Toolkit A Transition Guide to Adult PKU Management*. New Jersey : Applied Nutrition Corp. 2007:37.

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Special Considerations

Sweeteners and chewing gum

Sweeteners are used as an alternative to sugar, but while some are PKU-friendly, aspartame is not. “Phenylketonurics: Contains Phenylalanine” means this is likely a product you cannot eat or drink. Aspartame is an artificial sweetener that contains Phe; it is commonly known as NutraSweet™ or the brand name Equal® and is found in diet sodas and some reduced-sugar foods and beverages. A warning for people with PKU is listed on products that contain aspartame, but you must look carefully as the warning is often printed in small type.

Phe free Sweeteners

- o Stevia
- o Splenda (sucralose)
- o Honey
- o Corn Syrup
- o Sugar
- o Saccharin
- o Sugar alcohols

Chewing Gum

Below is a list of chewing gum from the Wrigley company. Each stick of gum contains 2-3mg of Phe.

- o Extra Winter Fresh
- o Orbit
- o Eclipse
- o Big Red
- o Double Mint
- o Hubba Bubba
- o Spearmint
- o Juicy Fruit

Some gums contain aspartame in small amounts. Based on the small amount of Phe in these products some individuals are able to include these in their diet. Check labels carefully to be sure the product you choose is PKU-friendly. Above is a list of Phe free sweeteners.