



Mexican restaurant guide

Adapting your menu



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

Healthy catering is not about removing lots of existing dishes from the menu and replacing them with healthier alternatives. Although you may decide to introduce some totally new dishes, the main emphasis is on making small changes to existing dishes. This may mean changing some of the ingredients used, the proportions of each component or how the food is prepared / cooked. Healthy catering is also about promoting the healthier options so customers are more aware of the choices available.

This information sheet is designed to be used alongside the Eat Out Eat Well Award guide for caterers, which gives general details about how to provide healthy options for your customers. The guide for caterers also gives information on how to qualify for the Eat Out Eat Well Award and how to promote healthier foods to customers.

This information sheet gives more specific ideas that are tailored to Mexican restaurants. As some restaurants also serve other Latin American meals, there is some reference to dishes from areas such as Argentina and Brazil.

Bread, tortillas and other starchy foods

A balanced meal should be based around starchy foods, which in a Mexican style restaurant would mainly be tortillas, bread, rice, and potatoes.

Bread

- Offer a range of breads (such as ciabatta or Inca bread) as a starter and with main meals.
- Offer butter / spread / oil in a separate dish.
- Offer an option of wholemeal / granary breads.
- Offer sandwiches without added butter / spread.

Tortillas

- Offer a range of non-fried corn and wheat (flour) tortilla dishes (e.g. burritos, fajitas).
- Where tortillas and tortilla dishes (e.g. chimichanga) are deep fried, use a monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil that is suitable for deep frying (e.g. rapeseed / canola, corn). Use optimum frying temperatures (look at the recipe/package or fryer instructions, but usually between 180-190°C), as a reduced temperature can lead to increased fat absorption.
- As deep fried tortilla chips are high in fat, do not automatically include with main course dishes (e.g. chilli con carne with rice & tortilla chips), or with sandwiches / wraps. Offer as an option for customers to choose if they want to.

Rice

- In paella and Mexican rice, use a minimal amount of monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil (e.g. olive oil, rapeseed/canola) to fry the uncooked rice.
- Do not add salt to rice when cooking. Bought-in stock / broth can be high in salt, try to make homemade broth without added salt.
- Offer brown rice with dishes such as chilli con carne, or mix half white / half brown rice.
- Try making brown rice paella / Mexican rice, or mix half white, half brown rice.
- Try using brown rice in meatballs and as a filling for tortilla dishes (e.g. burritos).

Potatoes (and Cassava)

- Offer baked / jacket, mashed and boiled potatoes as an alternative to chips / fries:
 - Jacket potatoes – Do not rub oil / salt onto potatoes before baking. If serving with a topping, offer a range of lower fat options (e.g. vegetarian chilli, chicken in a spicy tomato sauce). Offer butter / spread separately.
 - Boiled / new potatoes - use a minimal amount of unsalted water and try to re-use the water in sauces.
 - Mashed potatoes – mash without added butter or oil. Use a small amount of semi-skimmed milk instead.
- If roast potatoes are on the menu, cut into large pieces, use monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil and drain well once cooked. Avoid using salt, season with paprika / rosemary / black pepper / garlic instead.
- If chips / fries (or cassava fries) are on the menu:
 - Use thick, straight cut chips or wedges as these absorb less fat than thin chips / fries.
 - Use a monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil that is suitable for deep frying (e.g. rapeseed/canola, corn). Use optimum frying temperatures (as detailed above).
 - Do not add salt to chips, allow customers to add their own.
 - Bought-in 'seasoned' or 'spicy' fries / wedges may contain added salt. Offer a plain alternative, or season in-house with spices

such as paprika and black pepper.

- Do not automatically serve sandwiches or wraps with fries / chips. If already part of the menu, try changing to thick, chunky chips. Alternatively, consider charging an extra amount (e.g. £1) if customers want chips with their sandwich.

Fruit, vegetables and salads

Fruit and Vegetables –

- A balanced diet should contain lots of fruit and vegetables so have plenty of options available for starters, main dishes and tortilla fillings.
- There are a range of different fruits and vegetables that can be used, including:
 - fresh tomato - canned tomato
 - onion - peppers
 - mushroom - butternut squash
 - avocado - sweetcorn
 - kidney beans - black / pinto beans
 - corn on the cob - spinach
 - asparagus
 - salad items (see below)
 - jalapeno peppers - olives
 - celery - green beans
 - bananas - plantain
- Where possible, oven-bake, steam or stir-fry vegetables in a minimal amount of oil.
- Adjust the proportions of ingredients in tortilla fillings, wraps and chilli con carne to have extra vegetables and less meat.
- Try including extra beans and pulses in dishes such as chilli con carne and tortilla fillings (e.g. kidney beans, black beans, pinto beans).
- Have vegetable side dishes available [e.g. corn on the cob (without added butter), mixed seasonal vegetables].
- Offer fruit as a dessert and have fruit juice as a drink (see 'Desserts' and 'Drinks' sections).

Salads

- Offer salad starters and main dishes, including a variety of different salad items and vegetables (e.g. lettuce, rocket, cucumber, spinach, cherry tomatoes, grated carrot, avocado, peppers, sweetcorn, char-grilled vegetables etc.)
- Some salads, such as Caesar salad, have high fat dressings. Offer alternative salads without dressing, or with reduced fat dressing in a separate container (vinegar / lime / herb based).
- Where possible, include side salads with main dishes or have as an option on the menu.
- Try to include salad items in dishes such as wraps, burritos, tacos and burgers.
- If potato salad, coleslaw or prawn cocktail is available, use reduced fat mayonnaise.
- If shaved parmesan and croutons are usually served with salads, reduce the amount used, or offer separately to customers. Try baking croutons with olive oil, not butter.

Milk and other Dairy products

- The dairy products used mainly in Mexican cooking are cheese, milk, cream (inc. sour cream) and butter. However, due to the high fat content of cream and butter these would be classed in the eatwell plate as 'foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar'. (See the 'Reducing Fat, Sugar and Salt' section).
- Cheese – Mexican cooking can include a range of different cheeses in quite large quantities (e.g. parmesan, goat's cheese, Jack cheese and other Mexican cheese). Although cheese is a good source of protein and calcium, some cheeses are high in fat and / or salt.
 - Do not overload dishes with cheese. It should be possible to reduce the amount of cheese in at least some of the dishes without compromising on taste or texture.
 - Have an option of lower fat cheeses (e.g. Jack cheese made with skimmed milk).
 - Use mature, stronger flavour cheese where possible, as less will be needed.
- Where milk is used, offer semi-skimmed or skimmed alternatives where possible.

- Try replacing sour cream with reduced fat sour cream, or have as an option. Meat, fish and alternatives

Meat, fish and alternatives

Red Meat

- Use lean meat where possible and cut visible fat off meat, such as lamb, steak, gammon.
- Use lean mince for dishes such as minced beef and chilli con carne and skim fat off the top when cooking.
- If meatballs (albondigas) and burgers are made in-house, use lean mincemeat. If bought in, try to buy a lower fat / lean version.
- Grill, roast on a rack or stir-fry meat in a minimal amount of monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil (e.g. olive oil). Grill / BBQ minced products such as burgers to allow fat to drain away.
- Pork ribs / spare ribs are generally high in fat. If on the menu, grill / char-grill or roast on a rack to allow fat to drain away. The coating (e.g. BBQ sauce) may also be high in fat, salt +/- or sugar (see 'Sauces, stocks and dips' section).
- Use reduced fat sausages and back bacon instead of streaky bacon. Grill instead of fry.
- Cured sausages (e.g. chorizo) are generally high in fat and salt, so try to limit the number of dishes including these. Where possible, offer chorizo as an option for fillings and toppings, rather than automatically including it.

Poultry and Eggs

- Where possible, remove the skin from poultry, such as chicken and duck.
- Oven bake, grill or stir-fry in a minimal amount of monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil.
- When roasting / oven baking poultry, use a roasting rack to drain excess fat away.
- Bought-in processed poultry (e.g. spicy coated chicken, chicken burgers) can contain high levels of fat and salt. Where possible, replace with lower fat / salt alternatives, or add spices and seasoning in-house (without using salt).

- If using eggs, try to make without the use of cream or butter. If scrambled egg is made, use semi skimmed milk instead of whole milk or cream. Make in a non-stick pan with a minimal amount of monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil (e.g. olive oil).

Fish

- Try to include a variety of white fish, oily fish and shellfish in your menu. Examples in Mexican cooking could include:
 - White fish** - Cod, Red Snapper, Tuna (tinned)
 - Oily fish** - Salmon, Tuna (fresh), Swordfish, Sardines, Anchovies
 - Shellfish** - Prawns, Mussels, Crab, Calamari
- Fish / seafood can be used in starters, salads, tortilla fillings and paella, as well as main course fish dishes.
- Offer unbattered and non-fried fish and seafood – steam, poach, grill, oven bake or stir-fry in minimal amount of olive oil.
- When cooking fish, or making fish dishes (inc. fishcakes), do not add salt. Season with herbs, spices, lemon and black pepper.
- Some processed fish can be high in salt (e.g. tinned tuna in brine, anchovies, bought-in fishcakes). Where possible, buy a non-salted version (e.g. tinned tuna in spring water), or request a reduced salt version from suppliers.

Meat alternatives

- Offer a range of vegetarian starters and main dishes. Most tortilla dishes (e.g. fajita, burrito, quesadilla) can easily have an option with vegetarian filling.
- Make sure that there are some vegetarian dishes that are not cheese-based, e.g. vegetable fajitas, or vegetable paella.
- Try including an alternative protein source, such as beans and pulses in the vegetarian filling (e.g. kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans).
- If bean burgers are on the menu, ovenbake or grill instead of fry. Bought-in bean burgers may be high in salt.
- Try offering a tortilla filling using firm tofu

instead of chicken as a vegetarian option.

Reducing Fat, Salt and Sugar

Tips on how to reduce fat, salt and sugar can be found in most sections of this guide. Further tips and general reminders for adapting recipes and cooking methods are as follows:

- Offer meat / meat products, poultry and fish dishes that are oven baked, grilled, steamed, poached or stir-fried in minimal monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil (e.g. olive oil).
- Offer non-fried tortilla based dishes (e.g. burritos, fajitas, enchiladas).
- Where butter or lard is used, try to replace with monounsaturated or polyunsaturated oil (such as olive oil, rapeseed / canola oil, sunflower oil), which are a healthier choice than saturated fats. However, all fats are high in calories, so reduce the quantity of oil used.
- If deep frying, do not double or re-fry food as it increases fat absorption further. Only offer a limited number of fried dishes and use a monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil that is suitable for deep frying (e.g. rapeseed/canola, corn). Use optimum frying temperatures (look at the recipe/package or fryer instructions, but usually between 180-190oC), as a reduced temperature can lead to increased fat absorption.
- Refried beans are high in fat. Use monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil(not lard or butter). Where possible, offer as an option, rather than automatically include in a dish.
- Some cheeses are high in fat and salt. See the 'Milk and other Dairy products' section for tips on how to adapt recipes that include cheese.
- If creamed coconut is used in curries (e.g. Brazilian Moqueca), replace with reduced fat coconut milk.
- Offer salad dressings in a separate dish. Have reduced fat dressings and dressings based on lime/lemon, herbs and vinegar (e.g. fresh basil and sherry vinegar dressing).
- Reduce the amount of salt added to foods.

Do not add salt to sauces, vegetables, rice, potatoes or chips.

- Use other ways to enhance the flavour of the food, such as garlic, herbs, spices, chillies, black pepper and lemon, instead of salt.
- Offer alternatives to sugary desserts and drinks (see sections, 'Sauces, stocks and dips', 'Desserts' and 'Drinks').

Sauces, stocks and dips

- Some sauces contain high levels of fat, salt and/or sugar. Ready-made / bought-in sauces, stocks and dips can have particularly high levels.
- Try to make sauces and stocks in-house and reduce the amount of oil / fat, salt and sugar added. Use garlic, tomato, herbs, spices, chillies, cayenne / black pepper and / or lemon to add flavour.
- Where sauces are offered with meat, fish and poultry dishes, offer an option of a tomato based sauce (e.g. Chicken with chilli tomato / creole sauce), not just creamy sauces.
- Where creamy / cheese sauces are offered with meat, fish and poultry dishes (e.g. steak with pepper sauce / blue cheese and bacon sauce), serve sauce in a separate dish so customers can add as little or as much as they like.
- Where possible, offer dips and sauces separately so customers can add their own (e.g. on top of burgers, chilli con carne, tortilla dishes).
- BBQ sauce can be high in sugar, salt and / or fat. If BBQ dishes are on the menu (e.g. BBQ chicken or ribs), try to coat the food lightly, rather than cover the food in lots of sauce.
- Sour cream is high in fat. Have an option of reduced fat sour cream available.
- If sweet sauces are served with desserts, give customers the option whether to have sauce, reduce the amount used and offer a reduced sugar option (e.g. real fruit coulis).

Examples of less healthy Mexican starters and the healthier alternatives:

Starters

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Starters based on fried tortilla chips:
 - Nachos
 - Totopos / Tortilla chips with dips
 - Tostada (Tostados)
 - Flautas / Taquito
- Crispy tortilla baskets filled with salad / prawn cocktail etc.
- Soups made with meatballs (sopa del albondigas)

Healthier Options

- Non creamy soups e.g. red pepper and tomato soup
- Breads, e.g. Ciabatta
- Grilled sardines
- Olives
- Oven baked cheese (e.g. goats cheese)
- Grilled / oven baked chicken pieces / skewers

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Mushrooms / Prawns in garlic butter
- Deep fried and / or battered foods:
 - Calamari / squid
 - mushrooms
 - prawns
 - onion rings
 - cheese
 - chicken pieces / wings
 - potato skins
 - chillies (jalapenos)
 - fish goujons / dippers / fish cakes

Healthier Options

- **Grilled / Baked mushrooms (a little olive oil, instead of butter)**
- **Oven baked / grilled potato wedges**
- **Steamed / grilled mussels or prawns**
- **Roasted / char-grilled peppers with salsa dip**
- **Oven baked / grilled breaded fish goujons / fish cakes**
- **Char-grilled asparagus**

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Salads with creamy / high fat dressings (e.g. Caesar salad)
- Prawn cocktail served in a crispy tortilla, with full fat dressing added
- Peppers / chillies stuffed with sour cream / cheese
- Sour cream / chilli con queso / BBQ sauce as a dip

Healthier Options

- Salads e.g. chicken, avocado & rocket salad (dressing served separately)
- Prawn cocktail in a bed of lettuce, with reduced fat mayonnaise / dressing (served separately)
- Salsa / Pico de Gallo / Guacamole* as a dip (and reduced fat sour cream) *Guacamole is only healthier if sour cream is not added (check recipe)

Less healthy options – high in fat / salt

- Meat and poultry
 - Fried steak
 - Mince beef / chilli
 - BBQ chicken (i.e. with BBQ sauce)
 - BBQ pork rib meat
 - Meatballs
 - Bacon
 - Cured sausage (chorizo)

Healthier Options

- Meat and poultry (lower fat / salt options):
 - Grilled / oven baked chicken (no BBQ sauce)
 - Grilled steak (visible fat removed)
 - Lean mince beef
- Fish:
 - Tuna (in spring water, not brine / oil)
 - Salmon
 - Prawns
 - Sardines

Less healthy options – high in fat / salt

- Full fat cheese
 - parmesan
 - mozzarella

Healthier Options

- Reduced fat / lower fat cheese
 - lower fat brie
 - reduced fat cheddar
 - lower fat mozzarella
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Less healthy options – high in fat / salt

- High fat sauces, dips and dressings:
 - Sour cream
 - Chilli con queso
 - Full fat mayonnaise
 - Caesar dressing
- Coleslaw (with full fat mayonnaise)
- Fried croutons made with butter
- Fried vegetables (e.g. mushrooms, onions)

Healthier Options

- Lower fat sauces, dips and dressings:
 - Salsa / Pico de gallo
 - Guacamole (without sour cream)
 - Reduced fat mayonnaise
 - Reduced fat sour cream
- Reduced fat coleslaw (made with reduced fat mayonnaise / fromage frais)
- Baked croutons made with olive oil
- Raw vegetables (or cooked without fat – grilled, char-grilled, oven-baked) e.g.
 - Peppers
 - Sweetcorn
 - Mushrooms
 - Tomatoes
 - Onions
 - Aubergine
 - Courgette
 - Salad leaves – cos lettuce, rocket etc.
 - Watercress
 - Jalapenos
 - Avocado
- Beans (e.g. kidney beans, black beans)
- Boiled rice, Mexican rice

Main course

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Fried tortilla dishes e.g.
 - Chimichanga
 - Taquito / Flautas
 - Taco shells with filling
 - Tostada / Tostados

Healthier Options

- Non fried tortilla dishes (depending on fillings and amount of cheese added):
 - Burrito
 - Enchilada
 - Fajitas
 - Quesadilla
 - Chimichanga (if baked, not fried)
 - Taquito / Flautas (if char-grilled)
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Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- High fat / salt fillings for tortilla dishes:
 - Mince beef / chilli
 - Bacon
 - Cured sausage (chorizo)
 - Fried steak
 - BBQ chicken
 - BBQ pork rib meat
 - Full fat cheese
 - Sour cream

Healthier Options

- Healthier tortilla fillings:
 - Chicken (grilled / oven baked)
 - Prawns (grilled / steamed / stir-fried)
 - Grilled steak (visible fat trimmed off)
 - Vegetables (e.g. butternut squash, courgette, peppers, onions, aubergine)
 - Reduced fat cheese
 - Lean mince beef chilli with extra beans
 - Salsa
 - Reduced fat sour cream
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Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Dishes with minced meat (e.g. meatballs, chilli con carne, burgers)
- Fried meat, fish and poultry
- Mixed grill
- Processed chicken / bean burgers (particularly fried)
- Dishes with BBQ sauce (e.g. Pork ribs, BBQ chicken)
- Dishes with coconut cream (e.g. Brazilian Moqueca)
- Sauces containing cream +/- cheese (e.g. peppercorn sauce, chilli con queso, blue

cheese sauce)

- Paella with chorizo / bacon
- Salads with creamy, high fat dressings (e.g. Caesar salad)
- Thin cut deep fried chips/fries
- Mashed potato with cream / butter / cheese / chorizo
- Corn on the cob, with butter

Healthier Options

- Sauces based on tomato (e.g. chilli tomato, creole, enchilada)
- Grilled / oven baked chicken (e.g. chicken skewers, char-grilled chicken)
- Steamed / boiled / grilled / oven baked fish / shellfish
- Vegetarian chilli (based on vegetables or soya mince)
- Lean mincemeat for burgers, meatballs, chilli con carne
- Grilled, lean burgers (not fried)
- Boiled white / brown rice (or mixed)
- Mexican rice (minimal oil to fry rice)
- Paella with chicken / fish / seafood / veg
- Salads with dressing served separately (olive oil / vinegar / lemon / chilli based)
- Chunky, thick cut chips / wedges
- Alternatives to chips / fries - Mashed potato with semi-skimmed milk, jacket potato
- Grilled / boiled corn on the cob, without butter (plain or a little olive oil brushed on)

Desserts

- Desserts and puddings are often high in sugar and fat.
- Fried and deep fried desserts (e.g. Banana Taquito, crispy sweet tortilla shells) are particularly high in fat, so offer alternatives (see below).
- Try to include fruit based desserts, such as fresh fruit salad, that include a range of fruit.
- Use canned fruit in fruit juice, rather than syrup.
- Offer sorbet as an alternative to icecream.
- Allow customer to decide whether they would like cream / ice-cream / custard served with their dessert, or if they would like it plain.

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt

- Deep fried desserts e.g. Banana Taquito, fried ice-cream
- Chocolate / cream / cheese / based desserts e.g.
- Chocolate / fudge cake
 - Crème caramel
 - Cheesecake
- Canned fruits in syrup
- Ice-cream

Healthier Options

- Fresh Fruit salad (with fruit juice, not syrup)
- Canned fruits in fruit juice
- Soft tortilla filled with banana / strawberries / mango served with low fat fromage frais / yoghurt
- Sorbet

Drinks – cold/chilled

- Soft ‘fizzy’ drinks are often high in sugar, so always have healthier options available (see examples below).
- Have unsweetened fruit juice available. Look out for those labelled “Fruit juice drinks” as they usually contain added sugar, so should be avoided where possible.
- If cocktails are on the menu, have a selection of non-alcoholic cocktails based on a range of unsweetened fruit juice (e.g. cranberry, orange, mango).
- Have full fat milk available for toddlers and semi skimmed or skimmed for everyone else.
- If squash is available, use a sugar-free variety.
- Have bottled mineral water (still / sparkling) and artificially sweetened ‘diet’ soft drinks available.
- Provide a jug of water at each table.

Drinks – Hot

- Milk and sugar are often added to hot drinks, so healthier options should be available. Offer semi skimmed or skimmed milk and

- have artificial sweeteners available as an alternative to sugar.
- Speciality coffees that are topped with cream can contain high levels of fat and sugar.
- Offer teas and herbal teas (e.g. mint tea).

Children's/smaller meals

- Have smaller portions available for children (at a reduced price). Make sure there are smaller portions of the healthier options available.
- If there is a dedicated children's menu, make sure it contains healthier options and not just options with chips. Try to serve with vegetables or salad. The menu could include mini chicken burritos or a folded cheese, ham and mushroom quesadilla cut into triangle segments. Served with plain or Mexican rice and side salad.
- If the children's menu includes desserts, offer healthier options, such as fruit salad, fruit kebabs, yoghurt or sorbet.
- If ice-cream is part of the children's menu, offer options with fruit (e.g. strawberries and ice-cream), rather than ice-cream with chocolate / fruit flavour sauce or sweets.

Display, pricing and marketing

- Buffets / self service counters (if relevant)
 - Include healthier options and make sure there are plenty of starchy foods available (e.g. rice, tortillas, jacket potatoes, bread), along with healthy salad and vegetable options. Promote the healthier options by having information cards next to the dish that state what it contains (e.g. 'Healthy Tasty – Chicken & Tiger Prawn Paella with Portobello mushrooms and peppers cooked in a spicy tomato broth.')
- Do not automatically serve fries with burgers / wraps etc. Always offer a nonfried option (such as oven baked chunky wedges, or salad). Alternatively, always serve with a mixed side salad, then charge a minimal amount if fries are requested (e.g. 'add £1

extra for fries').

- Try promoting the healthier dishes as 'specials' or 'dish of the day', but do not increase the price as this may put customers off.
- If 'Meal deals' are available, offer healthier options for starters, mains, desserts and drinks.
- Try highlighting the healthier options on your menu, using the apple logo next to the healthier dishes.
- Make sure staff are aware of the healthier options and promote them to customers.
- Consider using some price promotions for the healthier options (e.g. offer a portion of char-grilled vegetables half price with every order).
- *N.B. If providing information about the food available, make sure any claims are correct and not misleading (e.g. be cautious about making claims such as 'low fat', 'fresh' or 'traditional').

FOOD ALLERGIES AN INTOLERANCES

Note: A small number of people suffer from allergies to food. In the UK, peanuts, milk, eggs and fish are among the foods that commonly cause severe allergic reactions, along with tree nuts, sesame seeds and shellfish. For such people, minute quantities of allergenic ingredients can have rapid and fatal effects.

Refer to the Eat Out Eat Well Award guide for caterers for further allergen information.

This document is based on the All Wales "Healthy Options" Award Scheme.



Mexican restaurants

Adapting your menu

