

**Airport Food Still Healthful:
More than 80 Percent of Restaurants Offer
Low-Fat Vegetarian Options, But Some Cities Lag Behind**
A report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Winter 2007

With the holiday travel season approaching, nutritionists with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) have again reviewed the healthfulness of meals served in some of the nation's busiest airports. PCRM found that, for the second year in a row, more than 80 percent of the restaurants surveyed offered at least one low-fat, cholesterol-free vegetarian entrée.

PCRM's report, now in its seventh year, found that some airports—including Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, and Chicago O'Hare International Airport—offer an exceptional number of healthful dining options.

But healthful choices are harder to find in a few cities, including Miami and Washington, D.C. At a time when fewer airlines are offering in-flight meals and 34 percent of U.S. adults are obese, more than half the restaurants in Reagan National Airport did not offer even one healthful entrée.

Method

From July to October 2007, nutrition experts from PCRM reviewed food establishments at 15 of the busiest U.S. airports. Each airport's score was determined by dividing the number of restaurants offering at least one healthful option by the total number of restaurants. Facilities that do not serve entrées, such as snack food kiosks and coffee shops, were not evaluated.

A restaurant was rated as healthful if it served at least one low-fat, high-fiber, cholesterol-free breakfast, lunch, or dinner entrée. Healthful entrées at airports covered in this report include the vegetable fajitas at El Paseo at Los Angeles International Airport, the roasted vegetable sandwich at Eat A Leaf at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, and the veggie stir-fry at Mediterranean Grill at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport.

Such low-fat vegetarian meals have been shown to decrease the risk of heart disease and cancer and are useful in the treatment of diabetes. Plant-based diets can also help prevent obesity and facilitate weight loss.

Results

Overall, 82 percent of restaurants at the 15 airports examined in the report offered healthful entrées. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport took first place in this year's report with a score of 94 percent, up from fourth place in 2006. Chicago O'Hare International Airport gained two points this year, scoring 93 percent and tying for second place with Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport. Los Angeles International Airport, which tied

with Newark Liberty International Airport for third place, scored 89 percent, a five-point increase over its 2006 score. At 84 percent, Denver International Airport came in at fourth place in 2007, despite dropping five points from 2006.

Las Vegas McCarran International Airport gets the award for “most improved airport” this year. Despite gaining just six points to rise to 75 percent, Las Vegas showed a greater increase in the percentage of restaurants offering nutritious options than any other airport evaluated since 2006. This lifts Las Vegas out of last place, where it spent the past three years, and bumps it up to eighth place. Also showing notable improvement is Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. The airport, which was not evaluated in 2006, improved upon its 2005 score by seven points, which lifted it from 10th to fourth place.

Making an inauspicious debut in 2007 is Reagan National Airport, which PCRM has included in its report for the first time. Reagan came in last place, with just 42 percent of its vendors offering low-fat, low-cholesterol options.

Detailed Review

Following is a summary of what PCRM nutrition experts found at each airport, ranked from best to worst:

1. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (94 percent): Dallas took first place in this year’s review, up from fourth place in 2006. Terminals here are packed with restaurants that offer at least one low-fat, zero-cholesterol entrée. Healthful offerings include the veggie noodle bowls and veggie sushi at Blue Bamboo Xpress, the spinach enchiladas at Cantina Laredo, and the black bean burgers at Bennigan’s. Also getting into the act is Wendy’s, where low-fat choices include baked potatoes, spring mix salads (minus the cheese), and veggie burgers.

2. (tie) Chicago O’Hare International Airport (93 percent): While it gained only two percentage points this year, Chicago jumped from fifth place to tie for second with Detroit. Travelers can enjoy such healthful offerings as Eat a Leaf’s roasted vegetable sandwich, Ciao Gourmet Market’s walnut and fruit salad with mixed greens, cranberries, strawberries, mandarin oranges, and jicama, and Fox Skybox’s portobello and red pepper brioche with basil and pine nuts (to make this dish low-fat, ask the server to hold the cheese).

2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (93 percent): Detroit tied for second place for the second year in a row, although the airport actually lost three points from its previous score. Still, low-fat, cholesterol-free fare remains widely available in the Motor City. Among the tastiest offerings are Tailpipe Tap’s Motown veggie sandwich, Max & Erma’s grilled vegetable sandwich on ciabatta bread with tomato-basil spread (sans cheese), and the veggie stir-fry and almond rice salad at Mediterranean Grill.

3. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport (89 percent): Los Angeles continues to add new restaurants offering nutritious choices, and it improved its score by five points this year, allowing it to tie for third place with Newark. Hungry travelers in search of a well-balanced meal can avail themselves of the vegetable fajitas at El Paseo, the vegetable sandwiches (minus the high-fat cheese) at Creative Croissants, and the roasted vegetable wraps at Eaterna.

3. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport (89 percent): Newark tied for third place this year despite losing six points. This is the first year the airport’s score has not improved. Nutrition-conscious diners can enjoy the mixed vegetable and tofu stir-fry at Asian Chao, the custom-made salads and wraps at GreenLeaf’s Grille, and the veggie burger (without cheese or mayo) at Dick Clark’s Restaurant.

4. Denver International Airport (84 percent): Denver scored five points lower this year than in 2006. Travelers holding out for healthful options can try the made-to-order salads at Chef Jimmy's Bistro and Spirits, the beans and rice at Cantina Grill, and the portobello mushroom sandwiches and garden burgers at the various Lefty's Grille establishments.

5. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (82 percent): Phoenix gained more points than any other airport this year, improving its 2005 score by seven percentage points (it was not evaluated in 2006). Tempting low-fat choices include Oaxaca's vegetable burritos and taco salad, Yoshi's Asian Grill's avocado cucumber sushi and edamame, and Roadhouse 66 Bar's veggie burgers and veggie pizza (minus the cheese, of course).

6. Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (81 percent): Although its score decreased by three points from 2006, Minneapolis placed better overall in 2007, moving from eighth to sixth place. Among the restaurants continuing to offer delicious, healthful entrées are Caribou Coffee, with its grilled portobello mushroom wraps, black bean and tofu salads, and tabouli salads, and French Meadow Bakery & Café, which serves up vegan chili, tofu salad, and a variety of soups and sandwiches.

7. San Francisco International Airport (77 percent): After tying for second place in 2006, San Francisco lost 19 points and dropped to seventh place. This decline stems from menu changes at restaurants that previously offered at least one healthful option, as well as the addition of eateries that serve only high-fat entrées laden with meat and cheese. Those in search of well-balanced, nutritious meals can still find them, however, at eateries such as Deli-up Café, which serves Middle Eastern platters, Ebisu, with its udon noodles in veggie broth and veggie sushi, and Max's Eatz, which serves a roasted veggie sandwich.

8. John F. Kennedy International Airport (76 percent): While it was not ranked in 2006, New York dropped seven points from its 2005 score and fell from fourth to eighth place. KFC Express and Boar's Head Deli are among the eateries that serve only high-fat, high-cholesterol items. But travelers in search of healthful and satisfying meals can enjoy the Buddha's delight and broccoli with garlic sauce at Sky Asian Bistro, vegetable dumplings and grilled vegetable sandwiches at Soup & Kimbob, and vegetarian wraps at the various Cibo Express eateries.

9. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (75 percent): Las Vegas showed the greatest improvement of any airport that was evaluated in both 2006 and 2007, gaining six points and pulling itself out of last place, where it had resided for the past three years. While a full quarter of its food vendors still do not offer even one low-fat vegetarian entrée, nutritious fare can be found at a number of restaurants here. Included among them are Prickly Pear Café, for its vegetable sandwiches, Don Alejandro's Texan Grill, for its vegetable burritos (hold the cheese), and Sbarro, which offers steamed veggies as well as spaghetti with marinara sauce and salad.

10. Orlando International Airport (73 percent): Orlando tumbled from first to 10th place this year, losing 24 points off its 2006 score of 97 percent. This decline stems from menu changes at restaurants that previously offered at least one healthful option. Despite these changes, low-fat, cholesterol-free meals can still be found at a number of the airport's eateries. Thai peanut noodles and vegetable dumplings are just two of the tasty menu items at Zyng. Travelers can create their own pasta at Macaroni Grill, which will leave out the cheese and substitute broccoli or spinach for the meat in any of its dishes. And Miami Subs offers veggie pitas as well as made-to-order vegetable sandwiches.

11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (72 percent): PCRM has evaluated Atlanta every year since 2001, and 2007 was the first year that the airport's score did not improve. Down 11 points, Atlanta fell from ninth to 11th place. But amid the hot dog vendors and coffee shops, travelers can still find some healthful options, including the vegan burritos at Qdoba Mexican Grill and the veggie wraps (minus the cheese) at Great

Wraps. Also notable are the black bean patties at Chili’s Bar & Bites and the vegetable plate with black-eyed peas, green beans, cabbage, yams, corn, and rice at Paschal’s Southern Delights.

12. Miami International Airport (67 percent): Miami lost a large number of points since 2004, when it was last evaluated, dropping from 85 to 67 points and plummeting from first to 11th place. The airport has a relatively small number of eateries, and the menus of many of these establishments no longer feature even one entrée that is low fat and cholesterol free. Nonetheless, healthful choices can be found. California Pizza Kitchen serves smashed pea and barley soup, Casa Bacardi entices with black bean and crispy rice salad, Jose Cuervo Tequileria offers jicama salad, and Café La Carreta features a buffet bar packed with salad, black beans, vegetables, and rice.

13. Reagan National Airport (42 percent): In last place this year is Reagan National Airport, which was evaluated by PCRM’s nutrition experts for the first time. While Reagan scored far below most of the other airports, with just 42 percent of its restaurants offering at least one healthful option, there were a few bright spots. Some of these include Matsutake Sushi’s vegetable combination roll, Cosi’s veggie chili, DC Samuel Adams’ vegetable sandwich (minus the cheese), and TGI Friday’s portobello melt (also sans cheese).

Table 1: Airport Scores in 2007

Airport	Score	Healthy Restaurants/Total Restaurants
1. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	94%	89/95
2. (tie) Chicago O’Hare International Airport	93%	81/87
2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	93%	56/60
3. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	89%	50/56
3. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport	89%	49/55
4. Denver International Airport	84%	41/49
5. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	82%	46/56
6. Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	81%	47/58
7. San Francisco International Airport	77%	46/60
8. John F. Kennedy International Airport	76%	62/82
9. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	75%	33/44
10. Orlando International Airport	73%	29/40
11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	72%	52/72
12. Miami International Airport	67%	31/46
13. Reagan National Airport	42%	10/24

Table 2: Comparisons from Previous Reviews

Airport	Score 2007	Score 2006	Score 2005	Score 2004	Score 2003	Score 2002	Score 2001
1. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	94%	94%	81%	59%	43%	53%	50%
2. (tie) Chicago O'Hare International Airport	93%	91%	92%	75%	71%	42%	64%
2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	93%	96%	89%	83%	70%	Not Rated	33%
3. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	89%	84%	69%	53%	47%	54%	60%
3. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport	89%	95%	75%	63%	60%	Not Rated	Not Rated
4. Denver International Airport	84%	89%	78%	78%	83%	79%	61%
5. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	82%	Not Rated	75%	44%	50%	48%	58%
6. Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	81%	84%	68%	54%	34%	44%	66%
7. San Francisco International Airport	77%	96%	88%	Not Rated	82%	96%	96%
8. John F. Kennedy International Airport	76%	Not Rated	83%	73%	57%	Not Rated	Not Rated
9. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	75%	69%	42%	33%	38%	45%	45%
10. Orlando International Airport	73%	97%	76%	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated
11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	72%	83%	77%	64%	59%	49%	40%
12. Miami International Airport	67%	Not Rated	Not Rated	85%	68%	Not Rated	Not Rated
13. Reagan National Airport	42%	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated