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M E D I C I N E

5100 WISCONSIN AVENUE, N.W. • SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, DC 20016
T: (202) 686-2210 • F: (202) 686-2216
PCRM@PCRM.ORG • WWW.PCRM.ORG

**Airport Food Often Healthful:
First-Place Tie Highlights Efforts in Dallas and Detroit to
Offer Low-Fat Vegetarian Options; Other Cities Lag Behind**
A report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
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During this season of increased air travel, where can a hungry traveler find a healthful meal? Nutritionists with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) surveyed meals in 15 of the nation’s busiest airports and found that 80 percent of airport restaurants now offer at least one low-fat, high-fiber, cholesterol-free vegetarian option.

The eighth annual PCRM Airport Food Review also found that efforts by many airport restaurants to offer healthful foods have increased, as evidenced by both a first-place tie and by last year’s lowest-scoring airport making this year’s biggest gain.

In a holding pattern since the 2007 report, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, and Chicago O’Hare International Airport remain the three airports that provide travelers the most opportunities for wholesome meals that incorporate fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes. This year, Detroit joined Dallas in first place.

Even some low-ranking airports are making improvements: Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, which remains in last place, had the greatest increase in the number of restaurants offering at least one healthful meal.

Method

From June to October of 2008, nutrition experts with 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.

A restaurant was rated as healthful if it served at least one low-fat, high-fiber, cholesterol-free breakfast, lunch, or dinner option. Healthful options at airports covered in this report include the Mediterranean platter at La Tapenade Mediterranean Café at Chicago O’Hare International Airport, the vegan stromboli at French Meadow Bakery & Café at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and the roasted veggie ciabatta at Brioche Dorée at Los Angeles International Airport.

Low-fat vegetarian eating patterns have been shown to decrease the risk of heart disease and diabetes and can also help prevent obesity and facilitate weight loss. A recent study in the journal *Circulation* found that people in 52 countries who ate a meat-heavy Western diet had a 35 percent greater risk of a heart attack than those who consumed little or no meat and plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Results

Overall, 80 percent of restaurants at the 15 airports examined in the report offered healthful meals. This year, two airports tied for first place. For the second year in a row, Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport took first place, with a score of 95 percent, up a point from 2007. And after two years in second place, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport increased its score by two points, allowing it to tie for first place.

The airport that really took off this year was Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport, which, after not participating in 2007, remerged in third place after a 10th place ranking in 2006.

The three lowest scores went to Las Vegas McCarran International Airport, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. While National Airport remained in last place for a second year, the airport was also the most improved. National had the largest increase in percentage of restaurants offering healthful options—from 42 percent in 2007 to 60 percent this year.

Newark Liberty International Airport had the biggest setback this year. With the greatest decline in restaurants offering low-fat meals, Newark moved from third to ninth place and lost 14 points.

Detailed Review

Following is a summary of what PCRM nutrition experts found at each airport, ranked from best to worst. (Note: Where menu items include cheese or other dairy products, to ensure a healthful meal, travelers should request that these meals be prepared dairy free.)

1. (tie) Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (95 percent): DFW increased its score by one point and remains in first place this year. Health-conscious travelers will find nearly 40 restaurants that offer at least one low-fat, zero-cholesterol meal. Healthful offerings include the vegan smoked tofu, broccoli, and mushroom burrito at 360 Gourmet Burrito, the portable portobello wrap (hold the feta) at UFood Grill, the Sonoma veggie wrap (minus the cheese) at Camille's Sidewalk Café, and the guiltless black bean burger at Chili's Too.

1. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (95 percent): After two years in second place, Detroit increased its score by two points and tied with Dallas for first place. The addition of new low-fat menu items—like the vegetarian pita at National Coney

Island Express—drives the Motor City into the number one spot. Zero-cholesterol items with an international flair include the tabouleh, hummus, and veggie burger at Online Café Bar and Grill, veggie and tofu rolls at Sora Japanese Cuisine and Sushi, and the fattoush (a salad made from vegetables and pita bread) or the veggie wrap at Waterworks Bar and Grill.

2. Chicago O’Hare International Airport (88 percent): Although Chicago remains in second place this year, it has lost five points since 2007. There are still plenty of healthful offerings, including Cibo Express Gourmet Market’s vegan tofu wrap, La Tapenade Mediterranean Café’s Mediterranean platter or roasted vegetable pizza flatbread (replace feta cheese spread with tomato basil sauce or pesto sauce), and O’Hare Bar and Grill’s portobello mushroom panini.

3. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport (83 percent): After a 10th-place finish in 2006, Houston fell off the radar in 2007. This year, the airport soared to third place with the addition of low-fat vegetarian options at eight new or existing eateries. For meals high in fiber and vegetable protein, try Houston Charley’s Grilled Subs’ grilled veggie delight (ask for no cheese), Burrito Del Sol’s made-to-order vegetarian taco salad and burritos, and the veggie burger at Ruby’s Diner.

4. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (82 percent): Although Phoenix moved from fifth to fourth place this year, its score remained at 82 percent. Travelers can fill up on healthful vegetables with Einstein Bros Bagels’ veg out sandwich (no cheese, of course), Taberna del Tequila’s vegetarian rice bowl and burrito (hold the cheese), and Ocotillo Sun’s veggie burger (request no cheese).

5. Los Angeles International Airport (81 percent): Even after losing eight points and dropping from third to fifth place, Los Angeles continues to offer many nutritious choices. Harried travelers can attain nutritional balance through the roasted veggie ciabatta (grilled eggplant, roasted red peppers, hummus) at Brioche Dorée, the California summer spinach vegetable wrap (minus the mayo) at Encounter Restaurant, and the veggie roll at Sushi Boy.

6. Denver International Airport (79 percent): Denver may be a mile high, but it continued its descent in our review this year. The airport lost five points—for a 10-point drop in its score since 2006—and dropped from fourth to sixth place in this year’s report. The best bets for healthful options include the vegetarian panini (hold the cheese) at Chef Jimmy’s Bistro & Spirits, the portobello sandwich at Pour la France Café & Bar, and the vegetarian tacos and burrito (request no cheese) at Que Bueno Mexican Grille.

7. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (77 percent): Minneapolis lost four points this year and moved from sixth to seventh place. The standout in Minneapolis remains French Meadow Bakery & Café, which offers creative, healthful fare such as tofu salad and vegan stromboli. Travelers looking for simple, delicious fare packed with soy protein should try D’Amico & Sons Café, with its tofu and zucchini wrap, and MSP To-Go, which offers a South salad that includes organic greens and grilled tofu.

7. (tie) San Francisco International Airport (77 percent): San Francisco held steady this year, remaining in seventh place at 77 percent. Healthful highlights include Sankaku's teriyaki tofu bowl or veggie sushi, Willow Street Wood-Fired Pizza's roasted veggie sandwich and vegetarian pizzas (whole ones can be made without cheese), and Mission Bar and Grill's hummus plate or vegan burrito.

8. Orlando International Airport (76 percent): Orlando rebounded slightly from last year's staggering 24-point loss. In this year's report, the airport gained three points and rose from 10th to eighth place. The best option for a healthful meal in Orlando is still Zyng Asian Grill, which has a menu that includes vegetarian soups, salads, and rice and noodle dishes. Travelers can also enjoy vegetarian lentil chili at McCoy's Bar & Grill, and Burger King offers a veggie burger (hold the mayo and cheese).

9. (tie) Miami International Airport (75 percent): Moving from 12th to ninth place and gaining eight points, Miami makes a modest attempt to return to its 2004 first-place ranking. Although less than half of the eateries in the airport offer even one entrée that is low fat and cholesterol free, there are a few healthful choices, including the Islander Bar and Grill's veggie burger, Quiznos' veggie sub, and Sushi Bar's cucumber and avocado rolls.

9. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport (75 percent): While not in last place, Newark is the biggest loser this year, dropping 14 points and plunging from third to ninth place. Even with the addition of 16 new eateries in Newark, the number of restaurants serving healthful options increased by just four. To narrow the search for a cholesterol-free meal, diners can seek out the veggie portobello mushroom burger at Garden State Diner, the Greek veggie pita and vegetarian Mediterranean lentil soup at Miami Subs Grill, and the roasted red pepper salad or pasta primavera with marinara sauce at Americo's Pizza.

10. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (71 percent): After two years of gains, Las Vegas dropped from ninth place this year and lost four points. Travelers can avoid gambling with their diets by choosing such healthful fare as Blue Burrito Grille's veggie fajita bowl, the Budweiser Racing Track Bar & Grill's vegetarian sandwich, and the Fox Sports Sky Box's veggie (Boca) burger.

11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (67 percent): Still in 11th place, Atlanta is down five points in 2008. Although PCRM dietitians expected to find a greater variety of healthful choices at this East Coast hub, air travelers will find some low-fat, high-fiber meals, including the veggie and California avocado sandwiches and Italian vegetarian panini at Atlanta Bread Company (hold the cheese and mayo). Also notable is Nature's Table Café, which offers vegetarian chili, a roasted vegetable wrap, and a vegetarian sandwich.

12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (60 percent): While National remains in last place for the second year, it did make the largest gain of any airport

featured in this report—18 points. Even with that increase the offerings are limited, but travelers can find relatively healthful options in Fuddrucker's veggie burger (no cheese), Potbelly Sandwich Works' vegetarian sandwich (no cheese), and Taxi Café's rice with vegetables.

Table 1: Airport Scores in 2008

Airport	Score	Healthful Restaurants/Total Restaurants
1. (tie) Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	95%	86/91
1. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	95%	59/62
2. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	88%	78/89
3. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	83%	50/60
4. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	82%	50/61
5. Los Angeles International Airport	81%	48/59
6. Denver International Airport	79%	38/48
7. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	77%	46/60
7. (tie) San Francisco International Airport	77%	47/61
8. Orlando International Airport	76%	29/38
9. (tie) Miami International Airport	75%	24/32
9. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport	75%	53/71
10. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	71%	41/58
11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	67%	56/83
12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport	60%	18/30

Table 2: Comparisons from Previous Reviews

Airport	Score 2008	Score 2007	Score 2006	Score 2005	Score 2004	Score 2003	Score 2002	Score 2001
1. (tie) Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	95%	94%	94%	81%	59%	43%	53%	50%
1. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	95%	93%	96%	89%	83%	70%	Not Rated	33%
2. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	88%	93%	91%	92%	75%	71%	42%	64%
3. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	83%	Not Rated	76%	46%	Not Rated	64%	50%	Not Rated
4. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	82%	82%	Not Rated	75%	44%	50%	48%	58%
5. Los Angeles International Airport	81%	89%	84%	69%	53%	47%	54%	60%
6. Denver International Airport	79%	84%	89%	78%	78%	83%	79%	61%
7. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	77%	81%	84%	68%	54%	34%	44%	66%
7. (tie) San Francisco International Airport	77%	77%	96%	88%	Not Rated	82%	96%	96%
8. Orlando International Airport	76%	73%	97%	76%	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated
9. (tie) Miami International Airport	75%	67%	Not Rated	Not Rated	85%	68%	Not Rated	Not Rated
9. (tie) Newark Liberty International Airport	75%	89%	95%	75%	63%	60%	Not Rated	Not Rated
10. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	71%	75%	69%	42%	33%	38%	45%	45%
11. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	67%	72%	83%	77%	64%	59%	49%	40%
12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport	60%	42%	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated