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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 Improves: Most Restaurants Now Offering Healthful
Low-Fat, Vegetarian Choices**
A report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
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As the holiday travel season begins, nutrition experts at the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) have again reviewed the food served at the nation’s busiest airports. PCRM’s report, now in its sixth year, reveals that the number of healthful choices available has increased significantly.

This year, 88 percent of all restaurants surveyed offered at least one healthful entrée to their customers, representing a 13-point increase over last year. This is an important improvement at a time when obesity and chronic disease rates are skyrocketing.

The increasing availability of healthful options at airports may have many causes, including a growing awareness of the power of vegetarian meals to reduce the risk of chronic disease. Moreover, as fewer airlines serve in-flight meals, travelers are increasingly turning to airport restaurants for food, and the demand for healthful options seems to be increasing.

Method

The review was conducted from June to October of 2006. PCRM nutrition experts surveyed 13 of the busiest U.S. airports for the availability of healthful entrées. The final percentage score for each airport was derived by dividing the facility’s number of healthful restaurants by the total number of restaurants. Vendors that do not serve any main entrées, such as coffee shops and snack food kiosks, were not included in the review.

A restaurant was rated as healthful if it served at least one breakfast, lunch, or dinner entrée that was low in fat, high in fiber, and cholesterol-free. Healthful entrées at airports covered in this report include the vegetarian rice and noodle dishes at Zyng’s Noodlery at Orlando International Airport, the grilled vegetable sandwich at Max & Erma’s at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, and the vegetarian chili at French Meadow Bakery & Café at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

High-fiber, low-fat vegetarian diets have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer and may be useful in treating diabetes. Plant-based diets can also help prevent obesity and aid weight loss.

Results

Healthy options at airport restaurants are increasing. Eleven of the 12 airports evaluated in PCRM's 2005 Airport Food Review improved their scores in this year's report.

Orlando's score improved by 21 points this year, putting it in first place with a score of 97 percent. Following close behind are Detroit and San Francisco, tied for second place with 96 percent. Newark also made notable improvements, placing third with 95 percent. The award for "most improved airport" this year goes to Houston, which gained 30 points for a score of 76 percent.

Las Vegas lands in last place for the third year in a row, despite making a 27-point improvement over last year.

Detailed Review

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

- 1. Orlando International Airport (97 percent):** Orlando's airport offers a bounty of healthy choices to hungry travelers. Highlights include the gazpacho focaccia at Fresh Attractions Deli, the vegetarian rice and noodle dishes at Zyng's Noodlery, and the vegetarian "purse" with couscous, tofu, and roasted peppers at McCoy's Bar and Grill. Another good choice is Macaroni Grill's create-your-own pasta, which offers low-fat options such as tomato sauce, broccoli, mushrooms, onions, and banana peppers.
- 2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (96 percent):** Detroit maintains its second-place status for the third year in a row, although it did see an increase of 7 percentage points this year. Cholesterol-free, high-fiber choices are easy to find, from the grilled vegetable sandwich at Max & Erma's to the vegetarian stir-fry at Mediterranean Grill and the seaweed salad and veggie sushi at Musashi.
- 2. (tie) San Francisco International Airport (96 percent):** San Francisco tied for second place this year, earning an extra 8 percentage points over last year's score. Among the many healthy choices in this airport are the Asian noodle salad at Guava & Java, the smoky split pea soup at San Francisco Soup Company, and the curried vegetables and rice at Harbor Village Kitchen.
- 3. Newark Liberty International Airport (95 percent):** Travelers facing layovers in Newark's airport will be pleasantly surprised. This year, many more restaurants are offering cholesterol-free choices, including the veggie burger at Dick Clark's Restaurant, the veggies with rice at Sarku, and a variety of vegetarian burrito and taco options at Maui Tacos.

4. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (94 percent): Choices at Dallas continue to improve. Health-conscious travelers will be pleased to find such options as the veggie noodle bowls at Blue Bamboo Xpress, the Caribbean salad at Chili's Too, and the Texas spring rolls filled with roasted corn, spinach, black beans, and roasted peppers at Cool River Café.

5. Chicago O'Hare International Airport (91 percent): Chicago was the only airport to decrease its score this year, but it dropped just 1 percentage point, so customers are still likely to find healthy entrées at our nation's second busiest airport. Veggie burgers and veggie and portobello mushroom sandwiches are widely available at airport eateries, such as Prairie Tap, Goose Island Brewing Company, and Gold Coast Dogs.

6. Denver International Airport (89 percent): Denver's score rose 11 points this year, although it still finishes in sixth place as it did last year. Notable choices include the vegetarian panini (hold the cheese, which contains unhealthy levels of fat and cholesterol) at Chef Jimmy's Bistro and Spirits, the teriyaki veggie or Colorado Sunshine bowl or wrap at Itza Wrap! Itza Bowl!, and the vegetarian taco, burrito, or beans and rice at any of the airport's four Cantina Grill Express locations.

7. Philadelphia International Airport (86 percent): This is the first year PCRM reviewed Philadelphia's airport, and it made a respectable debut. Healthy options include the vegetable sandwich or pasta marinara at Cibo Bistro and Wine Bar, the veggie bowl at Asian Chao, and the veggie wrap or salads at Lamberti's.

8. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (84 percent): Minneapolis gained an impressive 17 points this year. Healthy choices are getting much easier to find at the airport that ranked last in PCRM's report just three years ago. Travelers can now enjoy a black bean and tofu salad at Caribou Coffee, the vegetarian chili at French Meadow Bakery & Café, and a grilled veggie sandwich or veggie burger at Itasca Grille.

8. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport (84 percent): Los Angeles breaks into the top 10 this year with a 15-point increase. Wholesome choices include the roasted vegetable wrap at Eaterna, the mixed green salad or pasta marinara at Daily Grill, and the udon noodles or vegetable roll at Sushi Boy.

9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (83 percent): The world's busiest airport can't keep up with the improvements in healthy meal options at other airports. Despite a 6-percentage-point increase, Atlanta falls from seventh to ninth place this year. However, cholesterol-free choices are still available, including the Asian vegetable salad or veggie burger at Houlihan's, the vegetable plate at Paschal's Southern Delights, and the veggie burrito at Moe's Southwest Grill.

10. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport (76 percent): Although Houston won "most improved" this year, it still lags behind the rest of the pack. Patrons searching for a healthy meal should look to such restaurants as Chili's for its black bean burger,

Lotus Express for steamed vegetables with rice, and Lefty's Passport Grill for pasta primavera.

11. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (69 percent): While PCRM commends Las Vegas for increasing its score by 27 percentage points this year, the airport still has a long way to go. Health-conscious travelers should skip the many hot dog stands and bars and search for some of the more wholesome options available. These choices include the veggie sandwich at Prickly Pear Café, the beans and rice at Don Alejandro's Texan Grill, and the Dutch cucumber salad at Bar One.

Table 1: Airport Scores in 2006

Airport	Score	Healthy Restaurants/Total Restaurants
1. Orlando International Airport	97%	38/39
2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	96%	54/56
2. (tie) San Francisco International Airport	96%	50/52
3. Newark Liberty International Airport	95%	59/62
4. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	94%	80/85
5. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	91%	77/85
6. Denver International Airport	89%	33/37
7. Philadelphia International Airport	86%	32/37
8. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	84%	49/58
8. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	84%	48/57
9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	83%	57/69
10. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	76%	42/55
11. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	69%	38/55

Table 2: Comparisons from Previous Reviews

Airport	Score 2006	Score 2005	Score 2004	Score 2003	Score 2002	Score 2001
1. Orlando International Airport	97%	76%	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated
2. (tie) Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	96%	89%	83%	70%	Not rated	33%
2. (tie) San Francisco International Airport	96%	88%	Not rated	82%	96%	96%
3. Newark Liberty International Airport	95%	75%	63%	60%	Not rated	Not rated
4. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	94%	81%	59%	43%	53%	50%
5. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	91%	92%	75%	71%	42%	64%
6. Denver International Airport	89%	78%	78%	83%	79%	61%
7. Philadelphia International Airport	86%	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated
8. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	84%	68%	54%	34%	44%	66%
8. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	84%	69%	53%	47%	54%	60%
9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	83%	77%	64%	59%	49%	40%
10. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	76%	46%	Not rated	64%	50%	Not rated
11. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	69%	42%	33%	38%	45%	45%