



## **Airport Food Improves: Most Cities Offer More Low-Fat, High-Fiber, Vegetarian Choices** A report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine Winter 2005

As consumers begin making holiday travel plans, nutrition professionals with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) have reviewed the menus of restaurants at 14 of the nation's busiest airports. PCRM is pleased to report that the availability of low-fat, high-fiber, cholesterol-free entrées has increased sharply.

This year, 12 percent more airport eateries provide at least one healthy entrée. However, significant improvement is still needed. About one-quarter of the restaurants in these airports do not offer one healthy entrée, and even many health-conscious restaurants provide just one or two low-fat meatless options.

### **Methodology**

PCRM nutrition experts surveyed 14 of the busiest U.S. airports for the availability of healthy entrées. The review was conducted from June to October of 2005. Airports received a percentage score derived by dividing the facility's number of healthy restaurants by the total number of restaurants.

A restaurant was rated as healthy if it served at least one entrée for breakfast, lunch, or dinner that was low in fat, high in fiber, and cholesterol-free. Low-fat and vegetarian choices, healthy salads, and international cuisine are examples of entrées that can meet these requirements.

This review includes only those restaurants that offer breakfast, lunch, or dinner entrées. PCRM did not survey restaurants that serve snacks and drinks, such as most yogurt and coffee shops.

### **Results**

Airports are offering an increasing number of healthy options, according to PCRM's analysis. Eleven of the 14 airports reviewed this year improved their scores from 2004 or 2003. Every airport except for Houston either improved its score or maintained its previous rating.

Chicago, which took first place in the current review, scored 92 percent, up from 75 percent last year. Detroit came in second place for the second year in a row, improving its score from 83 percent in 2004 to this year's 89 percent. Other notable increases

include Dallas, which rose from 59 percent last year to 81 percent. Los Angeles has also made steady gains, rising from 53 percent in 2004 to 69 percent in 2005. Minneapolis improved from 54 percent in 2004 to 68 percent in 2005.

Phoenix won this year's "most improved airport" award by scoring 75 percent—a gain of 31 points from 2004. Note: Three restaurants at this airport could not be reached and were not included in the final score.

In Houston and Las Vegas, however, nutritious entrées are few and far between. Houston's score plunged from 64 percent in 2003 to 46 percent this year. Las Vegas, while improving 9 points from 2004, again took last place with a score of 42 percent.

### **Detailed Review**

Here is a summary of what PCRM found at individual airports, which are ranked from best to worst:

**1. Chicago O'Hare International Airport (92 percent):** Chicago continues to add more healthy choices to its menus, thereby gaining an impressive 17 points from 2004. Portobello mushroom sandwiches are readily available in Chicago at restaurants like the Chicago Bar and Grill, Fox Sports Sky Box, and Prairie Tap. Salad Works allows patrons to select a healthy entrée loaded with fiber-rich vegetables and beans. In addition, black bean burgers are available at all four of the Chili's Grill & Bar outlets in the airport, making a healthy meal easy to find.

**2. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (89 percent):** Detroit took second place for the second year in a row, achieving a 6-point increase from its score of 83 percent in 2004. Healthy highlights include the jicama salad and the fruit salad at Jose Cuervo Tequileria, the Greek salad and the Garden Burger at National Coney Island, and the veggie pasta with marinara at Pasta Pasta.

**3. San Francisco International Airport (88 percent):** San Francisco came in third in this year's review, racking up an increase of 6 points from 2003. Cholesterol-free, high-fiber options are readily available, thanks in part to the airport's abundance of Asian restaurants. Among these tasty, nutritious entrées are the Edamame and Seaweed Salad at Tomokazu Japanese Cuisine, the Mushu Vegetable Wrap at Harbor Village Kitchen, and the Teriyaki Tofu Bowl at Sankaku.

**4. John F. Kennedy International Airport (83 percent):** New York's JFK has improved its score by 10 points from last year, moving up from fifth to fourth place. Travelers will not have a difficult time finding a healthy meal since all four of the airport's McDonald's restaurants offer a vegetarian soy burger. Other nutritious choices include the grilled vegetable sandwich and the vegetable dumplings at Soup & Kim Bob and the Indian bean curries at Taste of the World.

**5. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (81 percent):** Dallas shot up 22 points this year by offering more low-fat, cholesterol-free options, improving its score from a dismal 59 percent in 2004 to 81 percent. Notable options include the grilled veggie sandwich and

the tomato on focaccia at the Frullati Café & Bakery, as well as a vegetable noodle dish at Manchu Wok.

**6. Denver International Airport (78 percent):** Denver dropped from its third-place finish in last year's review, even though its score did not change. To keep pace with improvements at other airports, Denver will need to add more healthy options. Cholesterol-free choices include the veggie burritos and the beans and rice at Cantina Grill Express, a Colorado Sunshine Vegetable and Avocado Wrap (or bowl) at Itza Wrap! Itza Bowl!, and a marinated portobello mushroom sandwich at Pour La France Café.

**7. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (77 percent):** Atlanta's score has risen 13 points from last year. New options include a black bean burrito at Great Wraps and a vegetable plate at Paschal's Southern Delights. Mandarin Express and Manchu Wok also offer healthy, cholesterol-free entrées such as vegetable noodle dishes and mixed vegetables.

**8. Orlando International Airport (76 percent):** This is the first year PCRM has reviewed Orlando. While the airport managed a passing grade, 24 percent of its restaurants do not offer even one cholesterol-free, high-fiber entrée. But health-conscious travelers have some excellent choices. Zyng's Noodlery offers vegetarian versions of all its salads, as well as a rice bowl with brown basmati rice and vegetables. Other highlights include the lentil chili (hold the high-cholesterol, fat-laden sour cream) at McCoy's Bar & Grill and a create-your-own pasta dish with choices of red sauce, broccoli, onion, tomato, mushrooms, black olives, and banana peppers at Macaroni Grill.

**9. Newark Liberty International Airport (75.41 percent):** Newark came in slightly ahead of Phoenix this year, increasing its score from 63 percent in 2004. Newark still has improvements to make to the 25 percent of the restaurants that do not offer one healthy option. But healthy choices are available, including the Southwest Vegetable Stew at Chili's Too, the vegetables and rice at Petit Bistro, and a cheeseless vegetable pizza at Villa Pizza.

**10. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (75.00 percent):** Travelers now have a much easier time finding healthy food at Sky Harbor. After receiving a 44 percent score in 2004, Phoenix added a large number of healthy options and improved more this year than any other airport reviewed by PCRM. New additions include Yoshi's Asian Grill, where travelers can find vegetarian chow mein and avocado and cucumber sushi. Garden salads are now served at Nathan's Hot Dogs and all seven Pizza Hut outlets in the airport, thus improving otherwise unhealthy menus. Travelers can also try a veggie sandwich with avocado, sprouts, cucumber, and carrots (hold the high-cholesterol cheese) or a fruit salad at Paradise Bakery & Café. Three restaurants in the airport could not be reached and were not included in the score.

**11. Los Angeles International Airport (69 percent):** Though Los Angeles improved 16 points this year, the airport still dropped from 10th to 11th place. Greasy bar food still dominates this airport, making healthy meals hard to find. The best options include the bean burritos and vegetable tacos at La Salsa, a spinach and tomato focaccia sandwich at

Backlot Deli, and the veggie chop suey and the veggie chow mein at Hamada Orient Express.

**12. Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport (68 percent):** Minneapolis improved 14 points this year, but still dropped from ninth to 12th place. Healthy new additions this year include organic made-to-order salads and sandwiches at French Meadow Bakery, bean curd and vegetables at Wok and Roll, and a cheeseless grilled vegetable pizza at California Pizza Kitchen.

**13. Houston-Bush Intercontinental Airport (46 percent):** Houston's score dropped 18 points from 2004, winning it the dubious distinction of being the only airport reviewed by PCRM to score lower this year than in previous years. Barbeque joints and fried-chicken restaurants dominate this airport. But health-conscious travelers can discover a few eateries that offer a low-fat, high fiber vegetarian option. These include the vegetable burrito at Pappasito's Cantina and the black bean burger at the airport's two Chili's.

**14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (42 percent):** Despite increasing its score from 33 percent in 2004, Las Vegas still finds itself in last place. While the airport is undergoing many changes to its restaurant offerings, the terminals continue to be dominated by Pizza Hut outlets and hot dog eateries, leaving passengers with few healthy options. But there are a few wholesome new additions this year, including the vegetable burrito at Don Alejandro's Texan Grill and the Garden Burger at Ruby's Dinette. Passengers not lucky enough to be near either of these restaurants can seek out one of the airport's four Burger Kings, where they can find a BK Veggie Burger (hold the mayo, please).

**Table 1: Airport Scores in 2005**

<b>AIRPORT</b>	<b>SCORE</b>	<b>HEALTHY RESTAURANTS/ TOTAL RESTAURANTS</b>
1. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	92%	68/74
2. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	89%	40/45
3. San Francisco International Airport	88%	45/51
4. John F. Kennedy International Airport	83%	49/59
5. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	81%	55/68
6. Denver International Airport	78%	28/36
7. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	77%	50/65
8. Orlando International Airport	76%	29/38
9. Newark Liberty International Airport	75.41%	46/61
10. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	75.00%	39/52
11. Los Angeles International Airport	69%	36/52
12. Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport	68%	32/47
13. Houston-Bush Intercontinental Airport	46%	22/48
14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	42%	19/45

**Table 2: Comparisons from Previous Reviews**

<b>AIRPORT</b>	<b>SCORE 2005</b>	<b>SCORE 2004</b>	<b>SCORE 2003</b>	<b>SCORE 2002</b>	<b>SCORE 2001</b>
1. Chicago O'Hare International Airport	92%	75%	71%	42%	64%
2. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	89%	83%	70%	Not rated	33%
3. San Francisco International Airport	88%	Not rated	82%	96%	96%
4. John F. Kennedy International Airport	83%	73%	57%	Not rated	Not rated
5. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	81%	59%	43%	53%	50%
6. Denver International Airport	78%	78%	83%	79%	61%
7. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	77%	64%	59%	49%	40%
8. Orlando International Airport	76%	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated
9. Newark Liberty International Airport	75.41%	63%	60%	Not rated	Not rated
10. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	75.00%	44%	50%	48%	58%
11. Los Angeles International Airport	69%	53%	47%	54%	60%
12. Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport	68%	54%	34%	44%	66%
13. Houston-Bush Intercontinental Airport	46%	Not rated	64%	50%	Not rated
14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	42%	33%	38%	45%	45%