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## **Most Airports Serving Healthful Meals: Detroit’s Airport Receives Perfect Score, But Low-Fat Vegetarian Options Harder to Find in Some Cities**

A Report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine  
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As the holiday travel season gets under way, health-conscious passengers are searching airport terminals for nutritious food. To determine the availability of healthful meals, nutrition experts with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) examined restaurant menus at 17 of the nation’s busiest airports.

PCRM’s Airport Food Review, now in its ninth year, found that 79 percent of airport restaurants now offer at least one low-fat, high-fiber, cholesterol-free vegetarian entrée. For the first time since PCRM’s survey began, one airport—Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport—received a perfect score. But healthful choices are still difficult to find in some cities, including Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

### **Method**

From June to November of 2009, PCRM dietitians reviewed eateries at 17 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 small coffee shops, were not included in the review.

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 Mediterranean platter at La Tapenade Mediterranean Cafe at Chicago O’Hare International Airport and the vegetarian chili at Nature’s Table at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The French Meadow Bakery and Café, operated in cooperation with HMSHost at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, offers a range of healthful options, including the vegan grilled tempeh reuben and the black bean chili.

High-fiber, low-fat vegetarian diets have been shown to reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. 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 heart attack risk than those who consumed little or no meat and plenty of fruits and vegetables.

## Results

Overall, 79 percent of restaurants at the 17 airports examined for the report offered at least one healthful entrée. Detroit's 100 percent score highlights its steady improvement since 2003, when it debuted in PCRM's Airport Food Review with a score of just 70 percent.

Other airports showing significant improvements include Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport—which both gained 10 points from 2008—and San Francisco International Airport, which rose 17 points this year.

While most airports have seen a steady increase in healthful options, two airports dropped dramatically this year: Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport, which lost 18 and 20 points, respectively. Additionally, three of the five lowest-scoring airports are those serving the nation's capital: Baltimore/Washington International Airport and Washington Dulles International Airport were surveyed for the first time this year and scored 71 and 70 points respectively. Although Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport gained 10 points since last year, it still came in at 13th place.

## Detailed Review

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

- 1. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (100 percent):** Detroit held on to the first-place title it earned in 2008 by increasing its score 5 percentage points to 100 percent. Every airport restaurant now offers at least one healthful entrée, such as the veggie sushi at Musashi, the hummus veggie wrap at National Coney Island Express, and the vegetable sandwich (hold the cheese) at Earl of Sandwich.
- 2. San Francisco International Airport (94 percent):** San Francisco is this year's most improved airport, rising to 94 percent from 77 percent last year. Hungry travelers can enjoy a vegetable curry and rice plate or vegetarian chow mein at the Harbor Village Kitchen or a vegetarian gyro from Max's the Greek.
- 3. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (87 percent):** Phoenix improved slightly this year, moving from fourth to third place. Visitors can find an avocado cucumber roll at Yoshi's Asian Grill, a portobello mushroom and red pepper sandwich (hold the cheese) at the Home Turf Bar, or a black bean burger at Chili's Too.
- 4. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport (86 percent):** Houston gained slightly from last year, with 49 of the airport's 57 restaurants now offering travelers a low-fat, vegetarian entrée. Healthful options include the steamed vegetables and rice at Lotus Express, the grilled veggie delite plate at Charley's Express, and the Caribbean salad at Houston To Go.

**5. Newark Liberty International Airport (85 percent):** After finishing in ninth place last year, Newark jumped up to the top five in the year's report, rising from 75 percent to 85 percent. Health-conscious travelers can enjoy a house salad with roasted red pepper and sun-dried tomatoes (ask for no mozzarella) at Vito's Gourmet Deli or spaghetti with marinara at Sbarro.

**6. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (83 percent):** Minneapolis gained six points this year, moving from seventh to sixth place. Diners seeking cholesterol-free meals can enjoy a Southwestern black bean salad at Caribou Coffee, the grilled tempeh Reuben or veggie chili and rice at French Meadow Bakery and Café, or butternut squash soup at Wolfgang Puck Express.

**6. (tie) Orlando International Airport (83 percent):** Orlando gained seven points this year, moving from eighth to sixth place. Healthful options include the lentil chili at McCoy's Bar and Grill, the fajita veggie burrito at Qdoba, and the soba noodles from Cibo Express.

**7. (tie) Denver International Airport (80 percent):** Denver holds steady in the middle of the pack, gaining just one point from last year. Filling low-fat choices include bean burritos and tamales (without cheese) at Tamales by La Casita and the vegetarian chili at Lefty's Front Range Grille.

**7. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport (80 percent):** This celebrity hotspot dropped just one percentage point from last year's score, but thanks to stiff competition from other airports, Los Angeles fell two spots to tie for seventh place. Healthful highlights include the vegetable sushi rolls at Sushi Boy and the vegetable sandwich with sprouts, sun-dried tomatoes, and avocado at Creative Croissants.

**8. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (77 percent):** After tying for first place in 2008, DFW lost a staggering 18 points in this year's report. The airport is packed with fast-food chains specializing in high-cholesterol fare, including six McDonald's outlets. But health-conscious travelers can still find some healthful entrées, including vegetarian sushi from Blue Bamboo Xpress and a falafel roll-up at Ufood Grill.

**9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (76 percent):** Atlanta's airport gained nine points this year, offering travelers more healthy meal options. Airport restaurants still feature a lot of hot dogs, fried chicken, and pizza. But diners looking for healthful meals have some excellent choices, including the hummus cilantro wrap at Great Wraps, the made-to-order vegetarian burritos and tacos at Moe's Southwest Grill, and the three-bean salad at Nature's Table.

**10. Miami International Airport (72 percent):** Just 28 of the 39 eateries at Miami's airport offer travelers a low-fat, cholesterol-free entrée. But healthful options do exist, including the vegetarian rolls at Sushi Bar and the vegetarian platter or the black beans and rice at Bongos.

**11. Baltimore/Washington International Airport (71 percent):** BWI Airport makes its Airport Food Review debut in 11th place, with only 71 percent of restaurants offering low-fat, cholesterol-free entrees. The best bet for savvy travelers is the Silver Diner, which offers portobello vegetarian stir-fry with tofu, veggies, and wheat noodles in teriyaki sauce, summer salad, and veggie chili with kidney beans, mushrooms, carrots, and squash.

**12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (70 percent):** This airport in the nation's capital has been slowly improving: In 2007, Washington National debuted in PCRM's report with a score of 42 percent and then jumped to 60 points in 2008. This year, the airport gained 10 more points by offering entrées such as a hummus and veggie flatbread sandwich (Cosi) and angel hair puttanesca (Cibo Bistro and Wine Bar).

**13. (tie) Chicago O'Hare International Airport (68 percent):** After taking second place in 2008, Chicago fell steeply in this year's report, dropping 20 points to 68 percent. Terminals are packed with restaurants serving hot dogs, cheeseburgers, and other high-fat fare—the airport is home to nine McDonald's outlets, for example. But savvy travelers can still find healthful meals, including the marinated portobello panini at Goose Island Brewing Company or the vegetarian sandwich at Argo Tea.

**13. (tie): Washington Dulles International Airport (68 percent):** Tying for 13th place is Dulles International Airport, which was evaluated by PCRM's nutrition experts for the first time in this year's report. Out of 34 restaurants, only 23 offered healthy, low-fat meals, such as the whole-wheat pasta with mixed vegetables at Moe's Grill & Bar.

**14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport (66 percent):** Although Las Vegas pulled out of last place in 2007 and 2008 after spending three years at the tail end of PCRM's report, the airport has plunged back to the bottom of the heap. While travelers do have a few healthful options—including the vegan wrap at Burke in the Box—too many eateries offer only burgers, sausages, hot dogs, or pre-made items full of fat and cholesterol.

**Table 1: Airport Scores for 2009**

<b>Airport</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Healthful Restaurants/Total Restaurants</b>
1. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	<b>100%</b>	<b>54/54</b>
2. San Francisco International Airport	<b>94%</b>	<b>60/64</b>
3. Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport	<b>87%</b>	<b>54/62</b>
4. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	<b>86%</b>	<b>49/57</b>
5. Newark Liberty International Airport	<b>85%</b>	<b>58/68</b>
6. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	<b>83%</b>	<b>50/60</b>
6. (tie) Orlando International Airport	<b>83%</b>	<b>39/47</b>
7. (tie) Denver International Airport	<b>80%</b>	<b>45/56</b>
7. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	<b>80%</b>	<b>45/56</b>
8. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	<b>77%</b>	<b>75/97</b>
9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	<b>76%</b>	<b>65/86</b>
10. Miami International Airport	<b>72%</b>	<b>28/39</b>
11. Baltimore/Washington International Airport	<b>71%</b>	<b>27/38</b>
12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport	<b>70%</b>	<b>23/33</b>
13. (tie) Chicago O'Hare International Airport	<b>68%</b>	<b>64/94</b>
13. (tie) Washington Dulles International Airport	<b>68%</b>	<b>23/34</b>
14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	<b>66%</b>	<b>38/58</b>

**Table 2: Comparisons from Previous Reviews**

<b>Airport</b>	<b>Score 2009</b>	<b>Score 2008</b>	<b>Score 2007</b>	<b>Score 2006</b>	<b>Score 2005</b>	<b>Score 2004</b>	<b>Score 2003</b>	<b>Score 2002</b>	<b>Score 2001</b>
1. Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport	100%	95%	93%	96%	89%	83%	70%	N/A	33%
2. San Francisco International Airport	94%	77%	77%	96%	88%	N/A	82%	96%	96%
3. Phoenix Sky Harbor International	87%	82%	82%	N/A	75%	44%	50%	48%	58%
4. Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport	86%	83%	N/A	76%	46%	N/A	64%	50%	N/A
5. Newark Liberty International Airport	85%	75%	89%	95%	75%	63%	60%	N/A	N/A
6. (tie) Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	83%	77%	81%	84%	68%	54%	34%	44%	66%
6. (tie) Orlando International Airport	83%	76%	73%	97%	76%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7. (tie) Denver International Airport	80%	79%	84%	89%	78%	78%	83%	79%	61%
7. (tie) Los Angeles International Airport	80%	81%	89%	84%	69%	53%	47%	54%	60%
8. Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport	77%	95%	94%	94%	81%	59%	43%	53%	50%
9. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport	76%	67%	72%	83%	77%	64%	59%	49%	40%
10. Miami International Airport	72%	75%	67%	N/A	N/A	85%	68%	N/A	N/A
11. Baltimore-Washington International Airport	71%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12. Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport	70%	60%	42%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
13. (tie) Chicago O'Hare International Airport	68%	88%	93%	91%	92%	75%	71%	42%	64%
13. (tie) Washington Dulles International Airport	68%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14. Las Vegas McCarran International Airport	66%	71%	75%	69%	42%	33%	38%	45%	45%