



Eating Out Without Eating A Hole In Your Wallet

(By Michael and Logan Collie, from WNC Parent, November 2005)

Our family loves to go out to eat together, for many obvious reasons. At home, we always eat together as a family, but most of the time we end up inhaling our food and quickly moving on from the dinner table to homework, sports practices and games, cleaning the kitchen, doing laundry or other work around the house. When we go out to eat as a family, it forces us to slow down. We get to really enjoy each other and talk about what's going on in our busy lives. My wife, who spends most of the day inside the house, gets a break from her "24/7 office". She is a great cook, so it's not about getting better food; it's about getting out of the house and building our family bonds together.

Sounds great, right? What a fantastic way to spend quality family time together! Ah, but here comes the bill. Fifty dollars?! Couldn't we have just done this at home? Did we really have to spend this money?! Now everything we've just enjoyed has become tainted by the tremendous expense of taking an entire family, human garbage disposal children included, out to a restaurant.

When our three boys spent four days with their grandparents this past summer, my wife and I ate several lunches and dinners together and didn't even approach what we typically spend on family meals out during a week's time. Does it really cost that much to feed our children? I quickly saw the disparity between the expenses and decided we were going to figure out a way to continue this valuable family time together while reducing the drain on our family budget. Furthermore, I hoped to use this project as an opportunity to further teach our children about saving money when eating out and the importance of being a good steward of the resources entrusted to our family.

Here are some tips that can help your family reduce the cost of eating out together:

- **Share meals.** Do any of us really need the amount of food that comes in an average meal? Restaurants know that as consumers we are always looking for value. We want to get the most amount of food for the least amount of cost, so portion sizes have increased substantially over the years. If you don't really need all of that food, share a meal together. It's healthier for our bodies and our budgets.
- **Drink water.** Many restaurants charge \$1.50 to \$2.00 for a soft drink or iced tea. Average that out and multiply it by five family members, plus a 15% tip, and that equals \$10! Again, it's healthier for our bodies and our budgets!
- **Take advantage of early bird specials.** Some restaurants charge reduced rates until 5:00. Eat earlier and you will beat the rush, likely have a more relaxed time together and save money in the process.
- **Take advantage of Kids' Specials.** This is where the teaching opportunity came in! Logan (our seven year old son) and I called 92 Asheville restaurants together to find out if and when kids eat free. We enjoyed our time together in Daddy's office after school one day and here is what we found out:
 - **Applebee's.** Kid's meals are .99 cents, drink included, on Tuesday's after 4:00.
 - **Beef'O'Brady's.** Children eat free on Tuesday's from 4:00-8:00.
 - **Fuddruckers.** Children eat free Monday thru Wednesday after 4:00.
 - **IHOP.** Children eat free everyday after 4:00.
 - **Lone Star Steakhouse.** Children eat free all day Tuesday.
 - **Moose Café.** Children eat free everyday after 4:00.
 - **O'Charley's.** Children eat free all day, everyday.
 - **Texas Roadhouse.** Children 12 and under eat free on Wednesday's after 4:00.

I hope that each of your families will benefit both relationally and financially by continuing to eat out together - without eating a hole in your wallet!



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