


a walk in the park

 You may think that the healthiest food available at a theme park is a caramel-dipped apple. (That counts as fruit, right?) But with a bit of planning, you can have a great time and stay on track, says Laura M. Nance, RD, nutrition specialist at the MUSC Weight Management Center in Charleston, SC. The key is to set realistic expectations (“This is probably not the week for an ambitious weight-loss goal,” Nance says), especially if you intend to splurge on an only-at-the-amusement-park treat. Here’s how.

PREP FOR SUCCESS More and more theme parks are picking up on consumers’ desire to eat more healthily. Disney, for instance, offers fresh fruit, hummus, baked potatoes, and vegetarian chili, while options at Six Flags include fresh fruit and grilled chicken. And almost every park posts its menus online. Map out your course beforehand in order to estimate when you’re likely to be hungry and decide where and what you’ll eat. That way, your whole family won’t suddenly be starving with not a vegetable in sight. Also, packing healthy snacks, such as carrots, fruit, and 100-calorie bags of nuts and pretzels means you’ll have something on hand if hunger strikes.

ENJOY WHAT YOU LOVE Looking forward to that Mickey ice-cream bar? Make it work by saving up your weeklies. Curious to try the Butterbeer at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter? Balance it out with a lighter lunch or dinner. Just be sure to plan how you’ll work in your treat, and then relish it. Another potential plus: Knowing that you’ll be having a specific goodie helps you avoid nibbling on the side. “It’s easy to think, ‘I didn’t get a snack, so I’ll have just a bite of my kid’s ice cream.’ Then an hour later, you’ll find yourself buying another snack,” says

Disney, Six Flags, Universal, and the rest are summer fun staples. That’s why we’ve made it easier to have a blast and stay on plan.

BY VANESSA GENEVA AHERN



Susan Peirce Thompson, PhD, author of *Bright Line Eating: The Science of Living Happy, Thin & Free*.

EMBRACE THE EXERCISE OPTIONS With so much to see and do, a theme park is the perfect way to get in your steps. In fact, Connect members who spent a day at Disney report that they each easily logged 20,000 on their Fitbits. Go prepared with good walking shoes, and stay well hydrated. (Think of those trips to the restroom as extra steps!) And, if you can, Nance recommends starting the day with a resistance-training or yoga workout; that mellow feeling can stay with you even through a stressful half hour of waiting in line.

EAT AT OFF TIMES Ubiquitous fast food and clamoring kids can make it easy to overlook the excellent higher-end dining options at many amusement parks—good onsite (or nearby offsite) restaurants that let you have a calmer, tastier, and potentially healthier meal. To avoid the crowds, make a lunch reservation for around 11 a.m., and

then aim for an early dinner, say 4:30 p.m. (Eat a healthy snack if you’re hungry later.) You’ll have a more relaxing meal and maximize your time on the rides, since you’ll be happily colliding in bumper cars while everyone else is waiting for food.

REMEMBER: YOU’RE NOT A GARBAGE CAN Amusement park prices can leave you as dizzy from sticker shock as from the roller coasters—but that’s not a reason to make unhealthy choices. Sure, it’s frustrating when your child loses interest after two bites of that foot-long hot dog you paid a small fortune for. Still, resist the temptation to finish it. Eating food you don’t really want doesn’t put those calories to any better use than throwing the food in the trash. Nance suggests taking a page from the parenting book and giving yourself a 10-second time-out before you unthinkingly polish off leftovers. “Ask yourself, ‘Is this really worth it?’ Chances are, the answer will be no.”