

My OA Abstinent Travel Tips

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I've traveled a fair bit and have learned many things from others and from my own experiences. This is what works for me. Please take what you like and leave the rest! -Deirdre

General Principles

1. I don't leave things to chance. I know when I'm eating, where I'm eating and what I'm eating.
2. Just because everyone else is eating out for a particular meal, I don't need to. I can bring my own food (did this at a wedding) or enjoy my abstinent meal in my room (before the special occasion meal) and just join them for conversation. If I do the latter, I usually say "I needed to eat dinner earlier, but I'm so glad to be able to join you. How ARE you?" That's usually the end of the conversation about why I'm not eating.
3. Sometimes I'm in a situation where I need to "eyeball" my food to handle portions. I now know the difference between what 4 oz of chicken and 4 oz of fish looks like. Often, when I'm at home, I'll challenge myself by putting what I think is a certain amount of fruit in a dish. Then I'll weigh it and see how close I am. I view this as a skill, and I refine it. I have an agreement with my sponsor that I will eyeball no more than one meal per day while I'm traveling, although I prefer to weigh every meal. This structure helps me a lot.

Planning my trip...

- I work out my "travel day" food plan a few days in advance and go over it with my sponsor. If I must deal with time-zone changes, I'll schedule my meals a bit farther apart (or a bit closer together) to bridge that gap. If it's enough of a time-zone change, I'll work with my sponsor to develop a more detailed plan and potentially add a meal if I'm heading West and have a long travel day (returning from Europe to California, for example).
- For extremely long travel days (or those that span multiple time zones), I put together a spreadsheet with multiple columns that identify the time in the relevant time zones. For example, if I'm traveling from California to New York to Dublin, I'll include three columns so I can "see" that at 11am in California, it will 2pm in New York and 7pm in Dublin. I try to adapt to the time zone where I'm going as quickly as possible and the spreadsheet helps me and my sponsor plan the timing and content for each travel day meals. The most important thing is that I have a plan that my sponsor agrees to and that I follow that plan.
- I make a list of each meal I'll be eating during the trip (including travel days). I determine which meals I'll be eating out. In general, I avoid eating out more than one meal each day.

Hotel

- When I book my room, I let them know that I have health issues that require that I follow a specific diet. I tell them I'll need a small refrigerator and a microwave (if they have that available) in my room. They sometimes charge me a fee for the microwave, but often they don't.
- I also explain that I'll need access to a freezer to re-freeze my ice packs each day. I drop them off when I return to the hotel each night and I pick them up again the next morning. I tip my "ice management support team" well and they are always happy to see me each day! If I'm bringing a lot of my own food, I may also tell them I'll need to store some of the food in the freezer.
- I ask the hotel to remove all the mini-bar contents (if there are any) before I arrive in the room. Sometimes this cleaned out mini-bar refrigerator is where I store the food I bring.

- If I'll be ordering food from room service, I look at the menu online or contact the hotel and arrange to get a copy of the room service menu emailed to me. I can then call ahead to ask any questions about whether items I plan to order contain sugar or flour or are pre-marinated.

Travel Foods

I pack the makings for abstinent meals that don't need to be refrigerated – pouches of tuna (already drained), pop-top cans of carrots and green beans, a dried grain, etc. and bring them in my purse so that if I end up at a restaurant that can't accommodate what I need, I have my meal ready to go. It's not the yummiest, but it works in a pinch. I've needed to use this backup meal (or parts of it) many times and I'm always glad I have it with me. Work with your sponsor to find shelf-stable items for all the food groups in your meal (vegetable, grain, fruit, protein, fat) and have a scale with you. String cheese or eggs are easy-to-handle proteins (although they do need to be refrigerated).

Airlines

- I have a note from my doctor indicating that, for medical reasons, I must carry my food on board. I select items for in-flight meals that are not "liquidy." I avoid applesauce, veggies or fruit that get soggy or create their own juice (beets and berries), etc. I favor apples, steamed broccoli, chicken, and brown rice. I put everything in an insulated lunch bag and add Ice-Brix (see below). I tuck in a few extra quart-sized Ziploc bags, just in case my Ice-Brix are confiscated by security (happened once) or I need more cooling power if it's a really long travel day. In that case, I ask the flight attendant to fill my extra Ziploc bag with ice and I add that to my insulated lunch bag. I monitor that and have it refilled again, as needed, to keep things cold for the entire flight. I've often traveled for a full 24 hours and arrived with my last meal still cold, so it can be done!

Eating Out







- If I'm eating out, I make a list of the possible restaurants I'll go to. I then look up the restaurant menu on the web or call them to have it emailed to me.
- If I have any questions, I call restaurants ahead and say I don't eat flour or sugar in any form and that I want to make sure they're able to accommodate me.
- If it's a very service-oriented restaurant (Four Seasons Hotel Restaurants, for example), I ask them if it's possible for them to weigh my food. I've learned that many restaurants weigh our food whether we ask them to or not. They do it as a cost control measure and I've been happy to find that they're often willing to do it before they plate my food.








Traveling Companions

I typically let my travel companions know that, for health reasons, I need to eat my meals at planned times. I mention that I want to be sure it's not uncomfortable for them if I pull out my lunch while we're on a flight and they haven't made a plan for lunch or if I pull out my lunch while we're shopping because they're not hungry and won't be eating for 2 more hours. I also tell them I eat specific portion sizes, so they should let me know if they want me to bring an extra bit of this or that for them to try. Otherwise, I really am not a very sharing person when it comes to food. I get this all out of the way (usually with some humor) so it doesn't cause problems on the trip.

I don't need to get into conversations about spirituality and God relieving my obsession, etc. My point is not to educate them about what I do or why I do it, but to make sure they know what to expect when they travel with me, so we're all comfortable.

Products I Like

Item	Photo	Notes
Ice for packing food		<p>These Ice-Brix cold packs are a must have for long travel days! I like the 6” x 4” size and I use these instead of Blue Ice. I’ll use two in my lunch bag and several more in my larger bag with packed food for the rest of the trip. They keep food cold much longer than other products.</p>
Lunch or Storage Container (29oz)		<p>For travel day, I pack my meals in leak-proof BPA-free plastic containers made by Lock & Lock. I love them! They come in a variety of sizes, but the Lock & Lock size I like for my one-dish meals are 29oz (870ml). If weight isn’t an issue, I also travel with glass versions made by Wean Green (36oz Meal Tubs).</p>
Black+Blum Lunch Box Original		<p>I love this elegant lunch container and I have several. It’s not quite as durable as the Lock&Lock containers I rely on, but I love packing my lunch in this container when I need an elegant meal for an event. Without the lid, the base looks like a ceramic dish.</p>
PackIt Freezeable Lunch Bag		<p>I love this Freezable Lunch Bag because it doesn’t require any ice. It doesn’t stay frozen as long as my Ice-Brix so I use it when take my lunch to nicer places and want to keep it simple. You put the entire bag in the freezer for 12 hours and then slip your meal in. I have a smaller version that they don’t seem to make anymore (mini) but the regular size is good too.</p>
Thermos (Raya line) insulated tote		<p>These insulated totes come in different sizes, so I can purchase a large one to carry a whole day’s worth of meals, or one for just my lunch. They refer to them as being a 9-can, 12-can or 18-can size. I find them at Target or online at Amazon.com. I use the largest one for my meals when I’m traveling internationally – I can fit 2 days of lunches and dinners in the big one and it goes in my wheeled carryon.</p>
Stanley Adventure To-Go Food Jar (18oz)		<p>My favorite food jar (Stanley Classic 17oz Food Jar) is discontinued so I’ve removed it from the list. The food stays hot for a shocking amount of time! When I need to replace it I’ll try this 18oz food jar. I’ve tried a lot of products in this category and the Stanley version keeps my food hot the longest. I can pack my dinner and, 6-hours later, it’s still almost too hot to eat. I avoid using a Thermos on a plane since the inspectors like to be able to see what’s inside.</p>

Item	Photo	Notes
Travel Food Warmer (made by Hot Logic)		This makes my world go round! I plug this Mini Personal Portable Oven in, put my lunch inside (in a flat-bottomed, sealed-top container – metal, plastic, glass, cardboard or ceramic) and it's hot within 2 hours. I've used it on a plane (if there's an outlet at my seat) and in the morning to heat my lunch while I get ready. By the time I'm ready to leave my hotel, I can transfer my hot lunch into my Stanley food jar and I'm set with a hot lunch for the day. I also use it at conferences and have a car adaptor to use it on road trips.
Knife with cover		This 4" paring knife made by Kuhn Rikon has a cover, so I can take it in my checked bag. It comes in several colors.
Cutting board		This small camp cutting board from REI is fantastic! It measures 6" x 9" and is about 1/16" thick, so it just slides in my luggage.
Foldable travel scale (made by Joseph Joseph)		This TriScale Compact Folding Digital Scale expands from the size on the right to the size on the left. It's about the size of a deck of cards. It takes a bit of getting used to because you need to have a plate or something on top of it before you zero it out because it's unstable otherwise.
Organic brown rice		I buy at Whole Foods or Costco and choose brands that are just brown rice and water – no oil, like some brands. It's supposed to be warmed up in the microwave, but I don't do that. I use it in meals that I make up the night before and store in the hotel refrigerator (my usual plan for lunch). Lundberg also makes a few varieties that I use.
Olive oil packets		3/8 ounce packets (like condiment packets) of organic olive oil . Good for camping or other trips where it might be more difficult to pack a small bottle of oil. These used to be sold in 1/2 ounce size, which was perfect, but sadly they've changed the size. You can discuss with your sponsor whether, for specific travel meals where appropriate, your abstinent oil portion is 3/8 oz.
Dishwashing liquid		I fill a 2oz Nalgene bottle (which is leakproof) with natural dish soap that doesn't suds up too much. I put this with my travel liquids and it makes cleaning dishes in the hotel at night a breeze! Available at most camping stores and online.

Packing Food

- I have a checklist of the food staples I use that make my program run. I review that list and note how much of each item I need. I then decide what foods I'll bring and what foods I'll shop for when I'm there. As an example, I always bring the quantity of breakfast grain I need and I bring enough for the entire trip (because it's not bulky and that's easiest for me).

- For travel day, I make a one-dish lunch and dinner with the protein, grain, fat and veggies allotted for each meal and that all goes in a Lock&Lock (see note above). I also pack (in Zip-loc bags) pre-portioned fruits for the day. I tend to pack apples and grapes, which don't get squished.
- For my second day's meals, if I need to, I prepare my lunch and/or dinner, package that in Ziploc bags, and refrigerate them. Then, for the rest of my meals during the trip that I'm bringing, I prepare the food, package them in quart Ziploc bags, and freeze them. Each evening at the hotel, I defrost a day's worth of meals (always keeping a day ahead since it takes 24 hours or so for a meal to defrost in the refrigerator), wash my Lock&Lock or Thermos containers, and then package the next day's meals each morning. Depending on the trip, I may bring several frozen meals or none at all. I've gone on trips where it was easy for me to find what I needed, I had flexibility to eat out at places that would work for me, or I had time to shop, prepare, etc. I bring all my meals when I don't have time to do that and when the trip's not that long.
- I pack weighed fruit in Ziploc bags for the first two days of the trip. That gives me a chance to get some fresh fruit while I'm there. If it's a short trip, I may bring all my fruit.
- If I won't have a microwave, I'll sometimes bring a dried grain and hard-boiled eggs for my breakfasts, unless I can get what I need at the hotel.
- If I have a lot of frozen food to bring, I put it in a big insulated tote (see the Raya bags above, which come in larger sizes), add Ice-Brix and put it in my checked bag. When I retrieve it, it's usually just as frozen as when I packed it because the cargo area on the plane is freezing in flight. I pack my travel day food in an insulated lunch bag with Ice-Brix in my carry-on bag.
- I have a little pack of "Abstinent Tools" – my cutting board, picnic knife, dish liquid, etc.

During my trip...

Eating Out

- I don't look at the menu, since I've already decided what I can eat at that particular restaurant.
- I mention to the server that I can't eat flour or sugar.
- I order a "double portion" of steamed vegetables so I'm sure I get the amount I need.
- I avoid vague statements like "light on the oil" because I don't know what I'll get. I ask for everything to be steamed and then I add the olive oil at the table.
- When I use my scale at a restaurant, I just ask them to bring me a small plate with my meal. Since my scale is white, it disappears at most restaurants with white tablecloths.
- At nice restaurants, if others order a first course and I don't, the server will sometimes bring me a plate with a little "taste." I say thank you, but I really am saving myself for the main course and I decline it. The first time this happened, I didn't know what to do! However, I can't allow my desire not to offend someone be a reason that I put something in my mouth. Now I'm prepared and I know what to say. I once ate at an Italian restaurant in New York where I felt pressure not to decline the dish. So I accepted it graciously, moved it around on my plate, gave a bite to someone else and then let them clear it, never having taken a bite. The point is to have a plan.

Returning Home

- Being tired leads to feeling hungry, so I keep this in mind on my travel day and the first few days home. I start to pack a few days in advance (not the night before, in a mad rush).
- I make sure I have food stocked at home, or I travel with what I need for my first day home, until I have time to get to the market.

Remember, we can take the show on the road!

We have what we need - a plan, a backup plan and a Higher Power. Have fun!