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U.S. restaurant menu prices rose 0.5% in October, their biggest monthly increase since December 2025

The increase outpaced grocery inflation, widening a cost gap that could weigh on dining demand

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Restaurant menu prices in the United States rose 0.5% in October, the largest monthly increase since December 2025, widening the price gap between eating out and eating at home and adding pressure to restaurant demand, according to a National Restaurant Association analysis published on Tuesday, November 10.

The association said the October increase marked a clear acceleration from the 0.2% monthly gain recorded in September. Over the first 10 months of 2026, menu prices increased by an average of 0.3% a month. Over the past 13 months, they were up 4.0%.

That compared with a slower increase for grocery prices. Food-at-home prices rose 0.3% in October after a 0.1% gain in September, the association said. So far in 2026, grocery prices have risen by an average of 0.2% a month, and they were up 2.2% over the past 13 months, about half the increase seen for restaurant menu prices.

For the restaurant industry, that gap matters because it can change how consumers allocate their spending. The association said the widening difference between food-at-home and food-away-from-home inflation could create headwinds for restaurant traffic as households compare the cost of dining out with the cost of preparing meals at home.

Price growth was stronger at full-service restaurants than at limited-service chains and other quick-service operators. Full-service menu prices rose 0.7% in October after increasing 0.3% in September. Limited-service prices rose 0.4% after a 0.2% gain a month earlier. Although both segments averaged monthly increases of 0.3% in 2026, full-service restaurants showed the larger 13-month rise, at 4.4%, compared with 3.6% for limited-service restaurants.

Other parts of the broader food-away-from-home category showed mixed results. Prices at vending machines and mobile vendors rose 0.5% in October, while prices at employee sites and schools, as well as other food-away-from-home locations, were unchanged from the prior month. The association noted that those categories can be highly volatile from month to month. Since September 2025, prices at employee sites and schools rose 3.7%, and vending and mobile vendor prices increased 2.5%. The broader category labeled other food away from home posted a 4.1% increase over the past 13 months.

Regional figures showed the strongest monthly menu price gains in the Midwest, where prices rose 0.7% in October. The West followed at 0.6%, the South at 0.5%, and the Northeast at 0.2%. Over the past 13 months, the Midwest also recorded the fastest increase, at 5.1%, followed by the West at 3.9%, the Northeast at 3.7%, and the South at 3.6%, according to the association.

The restaurant price data came as broader consumer inflation remained firm in October. The association said overall consumer prices increased 0.4% during the month, down from 0.6% in September but still advancing at a solid pace. Energy remained a major driver, with gasoline prices up 1.0% in October, 14.5% over the past three months, and 37.4% from a year earlier. Food prices overall also rose 0.5% in October after being unchanged in August.

Because October 2025 inflation data was unavailable during the government shutdown, the association said year-over-year comparisons for the overall consumer price index could not be calculated for October 2026. Instead, it said consumer prices rose at an annualized rate of 5.7% over the past three months and were up 4.1% over the past 13 months. Core consumer prices, which exclude food and energy, increased 0.3% for the third straight month and were up 2.9% over the past 13 months.

The association said transportation services, household furnishings and supplies, and medical care commodities were among the main contributors to October inflation, while used car and truck prices declined 1.2%. It also said the October inflation reading was stronger than expected and likely reinforced the case for another Federal Reserve rate increase at the December 7-8 meeting, following the September hike.

For restaurant operators, the new figures point to a difficult balance. Menu prices are still rising at a pace that outstrips grocery inflation, which may be needed to offset higher operating costs, but that same gap can make consumers more cautious about eating out, especially as broader inflation and fuel costs continue to strain household budgets.