

Burger Mania!

Nobody can deny the pleasures of having a big juicy burger after a long day... but just HOW bad are these burgers for us and what are the alternatives?

Burgers in all forms, shapes and sizes are the biggest evidence of Western influence on our eating habits. Whether it's Big Macs, Whoppers, or any other burger available, the idea of a sizzling piece of meat topped with cheese, mayonnaise and ketchup in a warm sesame bun still appeals to many. But have you ever stopped to think about the actual effects that these burgers have on our body?

The emerging burger culture is a factor in many of the health problems that we see today, including heart disease and childhood obesity. The fact of the matter is that it's usually not just the burger that causes the problems, it's the side-orders, toppings and lifestyle that goes with it that are also culprits. A person having a burger is very likely to have it with toppings such as cheese and mayonnaise and ketchup, French fries and a cola. It is the combination of all these things that have dire effects on our health.

Burgers in Focus

Meatburgers in a bun are good sources of protein and iron, but they are also high in saturated fats and calories and low in fibre, vitamin C and many other nutrients.

A typical quarter-pounder burger in a bun with medium fries would give you around 800 calories and 50grams of total fat. The complete meal will also contain, on average, almost a whole day's recommended salt intake. Adding cheese to the burger increases the calorie, salt and fat content. Other types of burgers available at fast-food outlets, such as chicken and fish are nearly as high in fat as meat burgers because the preparation methods are the same.

Excess salt in the diet can contribute to high blood pressure, dehydration, kidney stones, and many other health conditions. While saturated fat from burgers and junk food not only adds to weight but also affects cholesterol levels and contributes to heart disease. It can also cause digestive disturbances such as bloating, indigestion, heartburn, constipation and diarrhoea. Greasy foods also affect the skin and the effects are often seen in the form of acne.

Meat burgers, however, have more negative effects than chicken, fish or turkey burgers, because red meat is high in saturated fats and is a culprit in obesity. It is also mucus forming, which means it encourages the production of mucus in the body and therefore plays a major role in many common complaints such as congestion, runny nose, and sinusitis. Red meat also encourages inflammatory conditions, so it is best avoided if suffering from skin conditions such as acne, eczema, and allergies.

But despite all this, there is still light at the end of the tunnel! It is not *all* burgers that cause problems; it is burgers sold at fast-food outlets that contain the most harmful ingredients and are empty of any healthy nutrients. So, you can still have a delicious burger if you just put a bit more thought into planning and making it.

The Alternatives

Wisest choices at fast-food restaurants would be a plain small burger in a bun (about 250 calories and 10g fat) or a grilled chicken burger, with orange juice or water, and a side salad.

Ideas for homemade burgers are countless. The results can be delicious and mouth-watering as well as healthy!

Here are some suggestions for quick and easy home-made burgers:

- ◆ Chicken Burger - mix minced chicken with chopped onions, parsley and coriander and a bit of yoghurt. Make it into a burger and fry in the pan with 1 tbsp. olive oil. Put it in a wholemeal bun and top with lettuce and tomato. Serve with black olives and cucumber sticks.
- ◆ Turkey Sandwich – make a sandwich filling of mashed avocados with salad dressing and spread over two slices of rye bread. Add some turkey slices and top with lettuce and tomato. Serve with a side of hummus and carrot sticks.
- ◆ Chicken/Yoghurt sandwich – shred some roasted chicken or pan-friend chicken and add it to some slices of pumpernickel bread or wholemeal toast. Add a filling of yoghurt and dried mint. Serve with a chopped side salad of your favourite vegetables.

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