America's Best and Worst Burgers

Seven fat-soaked villains, some healthier options, and five hamburger heroes.

By Dave Zinczenko and Matt Goulding, Men's Health

Find more:

The 20 Worst Foods of 2009

16 Secrets the Restaurant Industry Doesn't Want You to Know

Unhealthiest Drinks in America

The burger industry in America is looking more and more like an arms race these days. Every few months, we watch in horror as another bacon-enhanced, cheese-embalmed, ranch-riddled weapon of mass inflation hits menu boards at the country's largest restaurant chains.

The Baconator, the Monster Thickburger, the FlameThrower—they sound like weapons, not something you'd order for dinner.

What makes our hamburger habit particularly scary is the Super Size Phenomenon, which for years has been mutating our burgers into double burgers and our double burgers into 1,250-calorie Triple Whoppers with Cheese.

A 1957 burger contained little more than one ounce of meat, but by 1997 that same meat wad had grown to six ounces. Stack one of the bloated burgers out there next to a beverage like those among these unhealthiest drinks in America and you're risking two days' worth of calories in a single, misguided meal.

Each year Americans eat about 40 billion burgers, which means that each of us downs nearly 150 of them. Choose better burgers, and you can save 10 or 15 pounds over the course of a year, without ever dieting, just by incorporating some clever *Eat This, Not That!* swaps. To get you started on your own burger war, we've compiled a list of the seven greasiest patties ever to be sandwiched between two buns. But because we understand you still need your burger fix, we've thrown in five of our favorites that you can eat with relative impunity.

Chili's Smokehouse Bacon Triple Cheese Big Mouth Burger with Jalapeno Ranch Dressing

- 1,870 calories
- 137 g fat (47 g saturated)
- 4,150 mg sodium

You know this burger's in trouble when it takes more than 20 syllables just to identify it. If you think the name's a mouthful, just wait until the burger hits the table. You'll be face-to-face with two-and-a-half day's worth of fat—a full third of which is saturated. To do that much damage with roasted sirloin, you'd have to eat about eight 6-ounce steaks. It's nearly three days' worth of saturated fat.

Eat This, Instead: Guiltless Black Bean Burger

- 609 calories
- 11 g fat (1.5 g saturated)
- 1,791 mg sodium

T.G.I. Friday's Cheesy Bacon Cheeseburger

- 1,590 calories
- unknown g fat
- unknown mg sodium

Although Friday's is mum on the fat and sodium, it takes only one number to realize that this burger suffers from bigger-is-better syndrome. T.G.I. Friday's average burger has 1,250 calories, and their appetizers are some of the toughest in the country to swallow, calorie-wise, as we've shown with this America's Worst Appetizers list.

Eat This, Instead: Ahi Tuna Ciabatta Burger

- 800 calories

Side note: when "best" burger on the menu still packs 800 calories, you'd be better off ordering the Dragonfire Chicken Sandwich, with 510 calories, instead.

Red Robin A.1. Peppercorn Burger

- 1,440 calories
- 97 g fat (unknown grams saturated)
- 5,784 mg sodium

There's hardly a burger on Red Robin's menu that contains fewer than a thousand calories. What pushes this particular burger to the position of worst—aside from the gratuitous use of cheese and bacon—is the three days' worth of sodium and the bed of fried onion straws wedged between patty and bun. Now we're beginning to understand why, while researching the story 16 Secrets the Restaurant Industry Doesn't Want You to Know, it may have taken Red Robin so long to come clean about the impact of its burgers.

Eat This, Instead: Garden Burger

- 517 calories
- 18 g fat
- 1,748 mg sodium

Denny's Double Cheeseburger

- 1,540 calories
- 116 g fat (52 g saturated, 7 g trans)
- 3,880 mg sodium

Add this to our ever-expanding list of the Trans-Fattiest Foods in America (This burger has more than three days' worth of the stuff.) In fact, with as much saturated fat as 52 strips of bacon and more sodium than 21 small bags of Lay's potato chips, this burger also belongs on the salt-packed list of 20 Foods Your Cardiologist Won't Eat.

Eat This, Instead: Boca Burger

- 500 calories
- 15 g fat (4 g saturated)
- 1,320 mg sodium

Dairy Queen 1/2 lb. FlameThrower GrillBurger

- 1,140 calories
- 82 g fat (27 g saturated, 1.5 g trans)
- 1,940 mg sodium

Regular consumption of the FlameThrower will torch any hopes you have of losing weight. This potential aortic uh-oh contains 60 percent more calories than the Bacon Cheddar Grillburger and more than twice as many calories as DQ's own Double Hamburger.

Eat This, Instead: Cheeseburger

- 400 calories
- 18 g fat (9 g saturated, 0.5 g trans)
- 920 mg sodium

Hardee's Two-Third Pound Monster Thickburger

- 1,420 calories
- 108 g fat (43 g saturated)
- 2,770 mg sodium

Hardee's and Carl's Jr. take a misplaced pride in their shamelessly caloric approach to everything they put under a heat lamp, which is probably reason enough for some to find another place to eat. Need more motivation? Many of their burgers break the perilous 1,000-calorie barrier; their worst bun-buster has nearly 75 percent of your entire day's calories and as much fat as a dozen Taco Bell soft tacos.

Eat This, Instead!: 1/3-lb Low-Carb Thickburger

- 420 calories
- 32 g fat (12 g saturated)
- 1,010 mg sodium

Ruby Tuesday Colossal Burger

- 2,014 calories
- 141 g fat

Ordering this burger would be a colossal mistake—with over a day's worth of calories, this beef terror will ravage your diet. What's worse is that there aren't any burgers on Ruby Tuesday's menu that we can offer as healthy alternatives. The harmless sounding Bella Turkey Burger packs 969 calories and 51 grams of fat; and even scarier is the 1,007-calorie, 53-fat-gram Veggie Burger.

Eat This, Instead: Top Sirloin Steak

- 336 calories
- 16 g fat

THE *EAT THIS!* BURGER HALL OF FAME

If you're hankering for a burger and have a choice as to where you eat, try these five suggestions:

DQ Original Burger

- 350 calories
- 14 g fat (7 g saturated)
- 680 mg sodium

Wendy's Quarter-Pound Single

- 430 calories
- 20 g fat (7 g saturated)
- 870 mg sodium

Burger King Whopper Jr. (without mayo)

- 370 calories
- 21 g fat (6 g saturated)
- 570 mg sodium

McDonald's Quarter Pounder

- 410 calories
- 19 g fat (7 g saturated)
- 730 mg sodium

In-N-Out Protein-Style Cheeseburger

- 330 calories
- 25 g fat (9 g saturated)
- 720 mg sodium

After you've conquered the burger field, make sure to nail down the rest of the all-time best restaurant swaps while you're at it. With knowledge and discipline, you can eat all of your favorite foods—without ever being on a diet—and still lose weight!

Also check out *Eat This, Not That!* on MSN shopping.

Have your own nominations for best and worst burgers? Please add a comment, and share them with the rest of us.

Provided by *Men's Health*