

THE Best Worst

By Bonnie Liebman
& Jayne Hurley

Nearly half of all Americans eat fast food at least once a week, according to industry surveys. But even the other half find themselves searching for the golden arches or one of its competitors every once in a while—when they're pressed for time, on the road, or badly in need of a restroom.

Good news flash: Most chains now offer at least a handful of decent dishes. And when you bite into some of them, you'd swear you were sitting in a downtown bistro (if it weren't for the plastic forks, containers, and chairs, that is). The trick is to separate the good stuff from the latest landmines that are lurking a few lines above or below on the menu board.

To draw up our list of the Best & Worst Fast Foods of 2002, we surveyed the top chains. (Smaller enterprises are likely to sell similar items.)

Burger King swept the Worst category. That doesn't mean that you can't go wrong at other chains, or that Burger King is a wasteland (two of our Best picks are from BK). But Burger King seems to have made a concerted effort to fatten up its menu with bigger and badder versions of basic fast-food items. Clearly, the chain cares more about its bottom line than Americans' bottoms.

Photos: Nick Waring (top); Burger King (bottom).

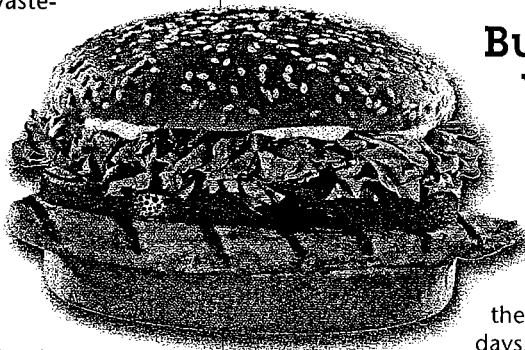
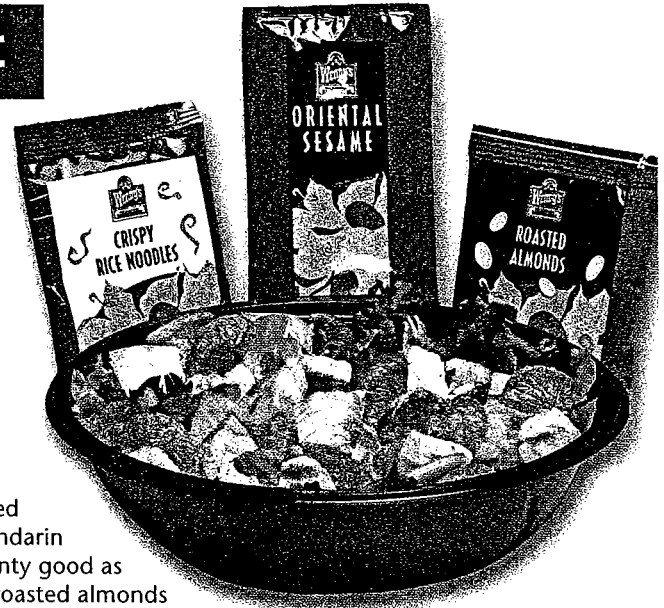
The information for this article was compiled by Sarah Wade.

The Best

Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad

Wendy's went creative when it designed its four Garden Sensations salads. The Mandarin Chicken's mixed greens, chicken, and mandarin orange segments are plenty good as is. But if you add some roasted almonds and Oriental sesame dressing, and maybe a few crispy rice noodles, they're fabulous. And the 420 calories (for salad, almonds, and half the dressing) are enough to make a meal. At \$3.99, you can't beat it.

The Chicken BLT, Spring Mix, and Taco Supremo Garden Sensations are equally interesting, but not quite as virtuous, unless you eat around the cheese that's sprinkled on top. If you want cheese on your fast-food salad, head to McDonald's. Its delicious Grilled Chicken Caesar McSalad Shaker manages to keep the sat fat at two grams, despite the shredded parmesan.



Burger King Chicken Whopper Jr.

Any grilled chicken sandwich makes a good meal. But, unlike some competitors, a Burger King Chicken Whopper actually tastes grilled. (McDonald's Chicken McGrill is a close second.)

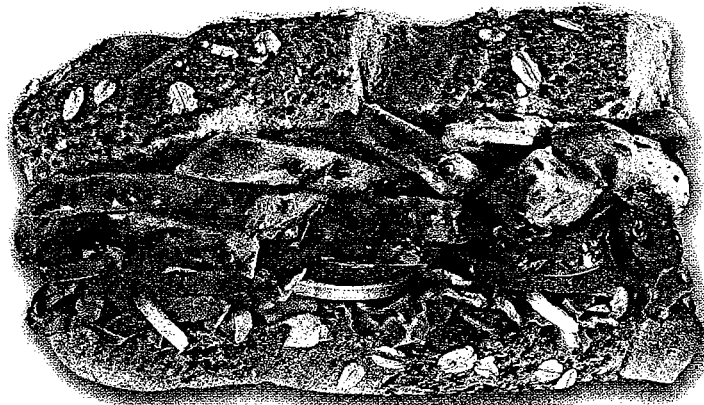
Why order a junior? Because that's just about the only way to get a normal-sized sandwich these days. The Jr. has a smaller chicken patty, smaller bun, less mayo, and (unfortunately) less lettuce and tomato than a regular Chicken Whopper. Sizewise, the Jr. is close to a McDonald's Chicken McGrill. And you can cut the Jr.'s 350 calories down to 310 (a regular Chicken Whopper has 580) by asking for reduced-fat mayo (available on any sandwich now that Burger King has added the BK Veggie Burger to its menu).



Subway's Low-fat Subs

Subway not only sells "7 Subs with 6 Grams of Fat or Less." It also goes to the trouble of advertising them, single-handedly pumping up the market for healthier fast food.

The seven—Veggie Delite, turkey breast, ham, turkey breast and ham, roasted chicken breast, roast beef, and Subway Club—range from about 200 to 300 calories for a six-inch sub, and that includes the



lettuce, tomatoes, onions, green peppers, olives, and pickles.

Now Subway has added three low-fat "Select Subs" to its menu. The Honey Mustard Ham, Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki, and Red Wine Vinaigrette Club range from 310 to 370 calories. No other major chain sells anywhere close to ten low-

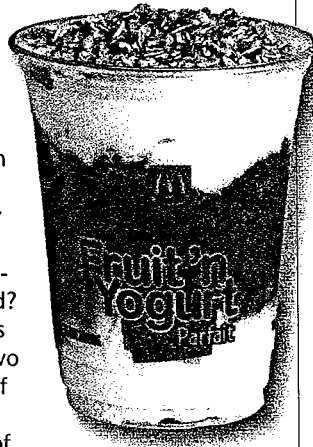
fat sandwiches. Last year, Subway surpassed McDonald's as the chain with the most outlets. It must be doing something right.

McDonald's Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait

Some people eat it for breakfast; some as a snack or dessert. But a Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait can also make a cool, refreshing lunch that won't leave your hips or arteries with more than they had when you woke up.

It's also a steal. Where else can you get $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of frozen strawberries and blueberries layered between a cup of low-fat vanilla yogurt and topped with a quarter cup of crunchy granola for less than \$2.50? Come to think of it: Where else on the fast-food circuit can you get fruit, period?

You'll walk away with 380 calories (280 if you skip the granola), just two grams of saturated fat, two grams of fiber, 30 percent of a day's calcium, an-unheard-of-low 240 milligrams of sodium, and a passel of phytochemicals in the berries.



The Worst

Burger King Old Fashioned Ice Cream Shake

In the mid 1980s, a typical (10-ounce) shake had about as many calories as a can of cola and a glass of whole milk combined.

These days, chains are tripping over each other to load down their shakes with extra calories. (Are they worried that Americans are too skinny?) But at least when McDonald's adds Oreos, Butterfingers, Nestlé Crunch, or M&Ms to its McFlurries, you know what you're getting. (Granted, roughly 900 calories in a "large" and 600 calories in a "small" might still come as a shock.)

Burger King's Old Fashioned, in contrast, looks like an ordinary shake. You'd never guess that a medium (22 oz.) has 760 calories and 41 grams of fat, 29 of them heart-breaking. Blame it on the ice cream.

And a large (32 oz.) Old Fashioned Shake has 1,200 calories and 64 grams of fat, 45 of them artery-clogging (that's more than you'd get from any burger at any chain).

McDonald's new Triple Thick Shakes are also awful...except that the King manages to cram in twice as much sat fat. Since when does a beverage supply half a day's calories and two days' worth of the kind of fat that leads to an old fashioned heart attack?

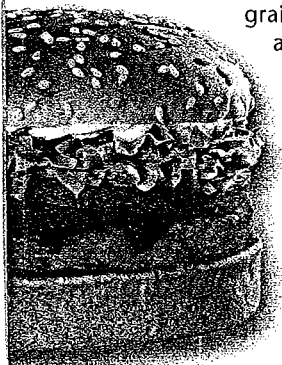


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Burger King BK Veggie Burger

It's about time one of the big burger chains put a meatless sandwich on the menu. But who could have guessed that Burger King—the fattiest-fries, most-saturated-shakes chain—would be the first?

Not surprisingly, the BK Veggie Burger has less saturated fat (two grams) and fewer calories (330) than just about any burger at any chain. Its vegetables and grains supply four grams of fiber, and it has almost as much protein as one of the chain's hamburgers. Our only gripe: We've tasted far better veggie burgers from the supermarket or at sit-down restaurants. BK isn't working hard enough to make its Veggie Burger mouthwatering. But at least it's on the menu.



The Worst



Burger King Fries

It's not that the fries at other chains are good. (A super size McDonald's fries has 10 grams of artery spackle.) But Burger King's fries are the worst.

An order of king fries has 600 calories and 30 grams of fat, 16 of them saturated

plus *trans*.

Remember: Fries may look like a side dish. But when it comes to calories and sat fat, they're really burgers in disguise: At McDonald's, a medium fries is the equivalent of a Quarter Pounder. A super size is a Big Mac. But the king fries at Burger King have five to eight grams *more* bad fat than those burgers.

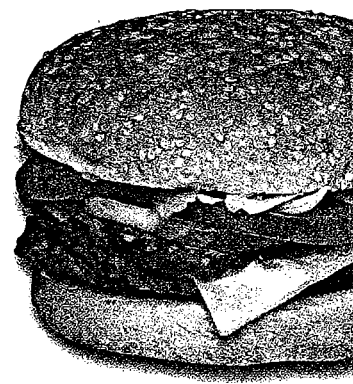
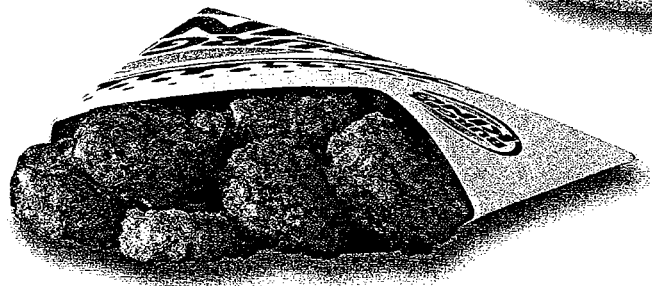
Burger King Hash Browns

Most side dishes can't make or break a meal. Burger King's Hash Browns can make or break your diet for the whole day.

Ounce for ounce, they're worse than Burger King's French Fries. (Fortunately, the largest order of hash browns weighs less than the largest fries.) It's not the calories (390) or the sat fat (seven grams) in each large order. It's the eight grams of *trans* fat in the partially hydrogenated vegetable shortening that brings the total artery glue in 25 potato disks to 15 grams—three-quarters of a day's worth in a breakfast side dish.

Burger King deserves credit for being the first chain to voluntarily disclose the *trans* fat in its foods. Now it ought to read its own numbers.

Photos: Burger King (top left, bottom), Nick Wearing (top right, center).



Burger King Double Whopper with Cheese

There's no shortage of bad burgers. But the Double Whopper with Cheese manages to beat them all.

A Quarter Pounder with Cheese, Big Mac, or Big N' Tasty with Cheese gobbles up about 12 grams of sat fat and 500 to 600 calories, give or take. That's nothing to boast about. The Whopper is simply a wider burger on a wider bun. It ups the ante to about 700 calories and 15 grams of artery-clogging fat—22 grams if you get it with cheese.

So it's no surprise that a *Double* Whopper with Cheese would take the cake. How do 1,150 calories and 33 grams of saturated plus *trans* fat grab you? (Where they grab you we don't need to know.)



Value Meals

There's nothing wrong with value. What's wrong is that nearly all value meals offer an economic incentive to stuff your gut.

McDonald's Value Meals start at about 1,000 calories (for a medium), hover around 1,300 calories (for a large), and reach about 1,500 calories (for a super size). Burger King's meals are about the same if you get a Chicken Whopper Jr. Go with a regular (beef) Whopper and the calories range from 1,300 to 1,800, depending on the size of the fries and soft drink.

Make it a Double Whopper and you're talking 1,600 to 2,100 calories.

And you'll be spending most of those calories on lousy foods. Most meals feature red meat and cheese (saturated fat), fried potatoes (*trans* fat), and a soft drink (sugar). Where's the fruit and (non-fried) vegetables? Where are the whole grains? The Chicken Whopper Jr. and Chicken McGrill Value Meals cut some sat fat, but with the fries and sodas, they're a long way from healthy.

Call them penny wise and pound foolish. Add in your doctors' bills and they're not even penny wise.

Playing Fast

Best Bites have no more than 3 grams of sat fat and Worst Bites have at least 10 grams. Within each category, foods are ranked from best to worst—from least to most saturated fat, then total fat, calories, and sodium.

Burgers, etc.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Saturated Fat (grams)	Sodium (milligrams)
✓✓ Burger King BK Veggie Burger	330	10	2	770
McDonald's Hamburger	280	10	4	590
Burger King Hamburger	310	13	6	580
Wendy's Classic Single with Everything	410	19	7	890
McDonald's Quarter Pounder	430	21	8	840
* McDonald's Big Mac	590	34	11	1,090
* McDonald's Big N' Tasty with Cheese	590	37	12	1,210
* McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese	530	30	13	1,310
* Burger King Whopper	760	46	15	1,000
* Burger King Bacon Double Cheeseburger	580	34	18	1,240
* Burger King BK Smokehouse Cheddar Griller	720	48	19	1,240
* Burger King Whopper with Cheese	850	53	22	1,430
* Burger King Double Whopper	1,060	69	27	1,100
* Burger King Double Whopper with Cheese	1,150	76	33	1,530

French Fries

Wendy's, biggie (5½ oz.) ¹	440	19	7	380
McDonald's, medium (5 oz.) ¹	450	22	8	290
Wendy's, great biggie (6½ oz.) ¹	530	23	9	450
McDonald's, large (6 oz.) ¹	540	26	9	350
* Burger King, medium (4 oz.)	360	18	10	640
* McDonald's, super size (7 oz.) ¹	610	29	10	390
* Burger King, large (5½ oz.)	500	25	13	880
* Burger King, king (7 oz.)	600	30	16	1,070

Shakes

Wendy's Frosty, medium (16 oz.)	440	11	7	260
* McDonald's Triple Thick, small (16 oz.) ²	570	16	11	290
* McDonald's McFlurry, small (12 oz.) ²	610	22	14	250
* McDonald's McFlurry, large (16 oz.) ²	890	32	21	360
* McDonald's Triple Thick, large (32 oz.) ²	1,140	32	22	580
* Burger King Old Fashioned Ice Cream Shake, medium (22 oz.) ²	760	41	29	320
* Burger King Old Fashioned Ice Cream Shake, large (32 oz.) ^{#2}	1,200	64	45	510

Salads, etc.

✓✓ Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad	150	2	0	650
<i>Oriental Sesame Dressing (1 pkt.)</i>	280	21	3	620
<i>Roasted Almonds (1 pkt.)</i>	130	12	1	70
<i>Crispy Rice Noodles (1 pkt.)</i>	60	2	1	180
✓✓ McDonald's Grilled Chicken Caesar McSalad Shaker	100	3	2	240
<i>Caesar Dressing (1 pkt.)</i>	150	13	3	400

✓✓ McDonald's Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait with Granola (12 oz.)	380	5	2	240
✓✓ McDonald's Garden McSalad Shaker	100	6	3	120
<i>Fat Free Herb Vinaigrette (1 pkt.)</i>	40	0	0	260
Wendy's Spring Mix Salad	180	11	6	230
<i>House Vinaigrette Dressing (1 pkt.)</i>	220	20	3	830
<i>Honey Roasted Pecans (1 pkt.)</i>	130	13	1	70
Wendy's Chicken BLT Salad	310	16	8	1,100
<i>Honey Mustard Dressing (1 pkt.)</i>	310	29	5	410
<i>Homestyle Garlic Croutons (1 pkt.)</i>	70	3	0	120
Wendy's Taco Supremo Salad	360	17	9	1,090
<i>Taco Chips (1 pkt.)</i>	220	11	2	150
<i>Sour Cream (1 pkt.)</i>	60	6	4	20
<i>Salsa (1 pkt.)</i>	30	0	0	440

Chicken & Fish Sandwiches

✓✓ KFC Honey BBQ Sandwich	310	6	2	560
✓✓ Wendy's Grilled Chicken Sandwich	300	7	2	740
✓✓ Burger King Chicken Whopper Jr. with Reduced Fat Mayo	310	9	2	920
✓✓ McDonald's Chicken McGrill with Light Mayo	350	11	2	910
✓✓ Burger King Chicken Whopper Jr.	350	14	3	900
✓✓ KFC Tender Roast Sandwich	350	15	3	880
✓✓ McDonald's Chicken McGrill	400	17	3	890
McDonald's Filet-O-Fish	470	26	5	890
McDonald's Crispy Chicken	500	26	5	1,100
Burger King Chicken Whopper	580	26	6	1,370
Burger King Specialty Chicken Sandwich	560	28	8	1,270
* Burger King BK Big Fish Sandwich	710	39	17	1,160

Muffins & Hash Browns

✓✓ McDonald's Lowfat Apple Bran Muffin	300	3	1	380
McDonald's Hash Browns (2 oz.) ¹	130	8	4	330
Burger King Hash Browns, small (2½ oz.)	230	15	9	450
* Burger King Hash Browns, large (4½ oz.)	390	25	15	760

Subway Subs (6-inch)

✓✓ "7 Subs with 6 Grams of Fat or Less" ^{2,3}	290	5	2	1,030
✓✓ Select Honey Mustard Ham ³	310	5	2	1,260
✓✓ Select Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki ³	370	5	2	1,190
✓✓ Select Red Wine Vinaigrette Club ³	350	6	3	1,520
Classic Tuna ⁴	450	22	6	1,190

✓✓ **Best Bite.** * **Worst Bite.** # CSPI estimate. ¹ Includes CSPI estimate of trans fat. ² Average of the entire line. ³ Numbers do not include cheese, mayo, oil, or salt. ⁴ Numbers include cheese, oil, and salt. Notes: Saturated fat numbers in *italics* include artery-clogging trans fat. Best Bite criteria for salads don't include dressings or extras.

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For a complete listing of fast foods (and other restaurant foods), see our latest book, *Restaurant Confidential* (Workman, 2002).