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building a better burger

With healthy ingredients, the all-American favorite gets a new lease on life. BY DEVIN ALEXANDER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEATRIZ DA COSTA



fOR THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT EATING RIGHT, burgers have become public enemy No. 1. But while we have to admit that most fast-food burgers deserve their health-pariah status, we hate to think that all burgers are verboten. In fact, we've got nine burgers right here to prove that the all-American meal can actually be good for you. What's more, we've taken the idea of the burger beyond the usual all-beef patty, two pickles, lettuce, special sauce sort of sandwich. The burgers here are built on everything from salmon to tofu to lean pork tenderloin, which not only makes them healthier but, tastewise, puts them a cut above the usual drive-thru special. Kiss greasy burgers goodbye — we're betting you won't even miss your old fast-food favorite.

A COUPLE OF SUGGESTIONS OF A TECHNICAL NATURE: When buying meats for burgers, make sure you're purchasing the leanest cuts possible. If your favorite grocery store doesn't offer ground chicken breast meat or ground pork tenderloin, simply ask the butcher to grind fresh chicken breasts or pork tenderloin for you. (Most grocery stores provide the service free of charge.) Another option is to grind the meat yourself by cutting it into 1-inch cubes and processing it in a food processor for a few seconds until it's ground.



Teriyaki Salmon Burgers

Besides tasting terrific, these burgers have the added attraction of being rich in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Makes 4 burgers.

- 1 pound skinned, boned, ground salmon filet
- ¼ cup + 3 tablespoons teriyaki sauce, divided
- ¼ cup minced green onion
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Pinch salt and pepper, or to taste
- Olive oil spray
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or whole-grain bagels
- 4 ½-inch rings fresh pineapple
or canned pineapple rings packed in juice

1. In a large bowl, place salmon, ¼-cup teriyaki sauce, onion, garlic powder, salt and pepper and gently mix until well combined. Pat meat into 4 patties that are ½-inch larger in diameter than the buns.
2. Spray a nonstick frying pan with olive oil spray and place it over high heat. Place patties in the pan and reduce heat to medium. Cook 3–5 minutes per side or until salmon is just cooked through.
3. Meanwhile, split buns, place in a pan over medium heat and toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place salmon burgers on bottom halves of buns, top each with a pineapple ring, then drizzle the remaining teriyaki sauce on top. Cover with the top halves of the buns.

PER SERVING: 288 calories, 28 g protein, 20 g carbohydrate, 10.5 g fat (2 g saturated fat), 2 g fiber

Very Veggie Burgers

Think of veggie burgers as you would any nonvegetarian burger — that is, as a blank canvas that you can dress up any which way. This recipe keeps it simple — just mustard and microgreens — but you can top veggie burgers with anything from caramelized onions and blue cheese to sautéed mushrooms. Makes 4 burgers.

- 4 seasoned veggie burger patties
(such as Boca or Gardenburger)
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or sprouted grain rolls
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard, or to taste
- 1 cup microgreens (or, if unavailable, alfalfa sprouts)

1. Preheat a grill to high heat.
2. Place patties on grill and reduce heat to low. Cook 3–5 minutes per side or until heated through.
3. Meanwhile, split buns and place on grill to toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place burgers on bottom halves of buns, slather with mustard and top with microgreens. Cover with top halves of the buns.

PER SERVING: 278 calories, 20 g protein, 36 g carbohydrate, 6 g fat (1.5 g saturated fat), 8.5 g fiber

Ultimate Gourmet Burger

If you can't find fresh basil leaves, you can substitute ¼ cup chopped fresh spinach leaves for the basil. Makes 4 burgers.

- 1 pound 96% lean ground beef (such as Moran's)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil leaves
- 4 small garlic cloves, minced
- ½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon pepper, or to taste
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or pita breads
- 1 cup roasted red pepper strips
- ½ cup crumbled reduced-fat feta cheese

1. Preheat grill to high heat.
2. In a large bowl, place the beef, basil, garlic, salt and pepper and gently mix until well combined. Pat meat into 4 patties that are ½-inch larger in diameter than the buns. Place patties on the grill and cook 2–5 minutes per side or until beef reaches desired doneness.
3. Meanwhile, split the buns and place on the grill to toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place burgers on bottom halves of buns and top with red pepper, then feta. Cover with tops of buns.

PER SERVING: 354 calories, 29.5 g protein, 34 g carbohydrate, 11 g fat (4.7 g saturated fat), 6 g fiber

Cranberry Turkey Burgers

Cranberry sauce is too good to relegate to the holidays. Make your own sauce (combine 1 cup water, 1 cup sugar, bring to a boil, add 1 12-oz. package cranberries, boil gently for 10 minutes, then cover; cool completely), or buy it at a gourmet market. Makes 4 burgers.

- 1 pound ground turkey breast
- 2 egg whites, lightly beaten
- 2 teaspoons dried rosemary
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon pepper, or to taste
- Olive oil spray
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or rosemary rolls
- ½ cup whole-berry cranberry sauce

1. In a large bowl, place turkey, egg whites, rosemary, garlic powder, salt and pepper and gently mix until well combined. Pat meat into 4 patties that are ½-inch larger in diameter than the buns.
2. Spray a large nonstick frying pan with olive oil spray and place over high heat. Place patties in the pan and reduce heat to medium. Cook 3–5 minutes per side or until turkey is no longer pink in the center.
3. Meanwhile, split buns, place in a pan over medium heat and toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place turkey burgers on bottom halves of buns and top with cranberry sauce. Cover with the top halves of the buns.

PER SERVING: 330 calories, 33 g protein, 39.5 g carbohydrate, 4 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 5 g fiber

Barbecue Chicken Burgers

Using store-bought barbecue sauce is fine; just be sure to check the label before you buy, since some brands are laden with sugar. Makes 4 burgers.

- 1 pound ground chicken breast
- ¼ cup + ⅓ cup barbecue sauce, divided
- ¼ cup minced red onion
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- Olive oil spray
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or onion rolls
- 4 large leaves green leaf lettuce
- 4 large slices tomato
- Slivered red onion slices, to taste

1. In a large bowl, place the chicken, ¼ cup barbecue sauce, onion, garlic powder, salt and pepper and gently mix until well combined. Pat meat into 4 patties that are ½-inch larger in diameter than the buns.
2. Spray a large nonstick frying pan with olive oil and place it over high heat. Place patties in the pan and reduce heat to medium. Cook 3–5 minutes per side or until the chicken is no longer pink in the center.
3. Meanwhile, split buns, place in a pan over medium heat and toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place chicken burgers on the bottom halves of the buns and top with lettuce, tomato, slivered onion and remaining barbecue sauce. Cover with the top halves of the buns.

PER SERVING: 317 calories, 32 g protein, 37 g carbohydrate, 5 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 5.5 g fiber

Tofu Parmesan Burgers

The beauty of tofu is that it takes on the flavor of whatever you pair it with. These burgers are Italian-style, but if you vary the herbs and spices you use, you can make anything from Asian to Indian tofu burgers. Makes 4 burgers.

- 2 12-ounce blocks of low-fat, extra-firm tofu, each cut in half to form two “steaks”
- Olive oil spray
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh basil
- 4 small garlic cloves, chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or sourdough rolls
- 1⅓ cup low-fat marinara sauce (or more to taste)
- ½ cup very finely shredded parmesan cheese

1. Preheat grill to medium heat.
2. Lightly spray tofu with olive oil. In a small bowl, combine the basil and garlic. Press the basil and garlic mixture onto the tofu and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Grill tofu approximately 3 minutes per side until it's warm throughout. Split the buns and place on grill for 1 minute to toast.
3. Meanwhile, heat the sauce in the microwave or in a small saucepan on the stove until piping hot. Place tofu steaks on bottom halves of buns and top with the sauce, then the cheese. Cover with the tops of the buns.

PER SERVING: 313 calories, 22 g protein, 38 g carbohydrate, 8.5 g fat (3 g saturated fat), 6 g fiber



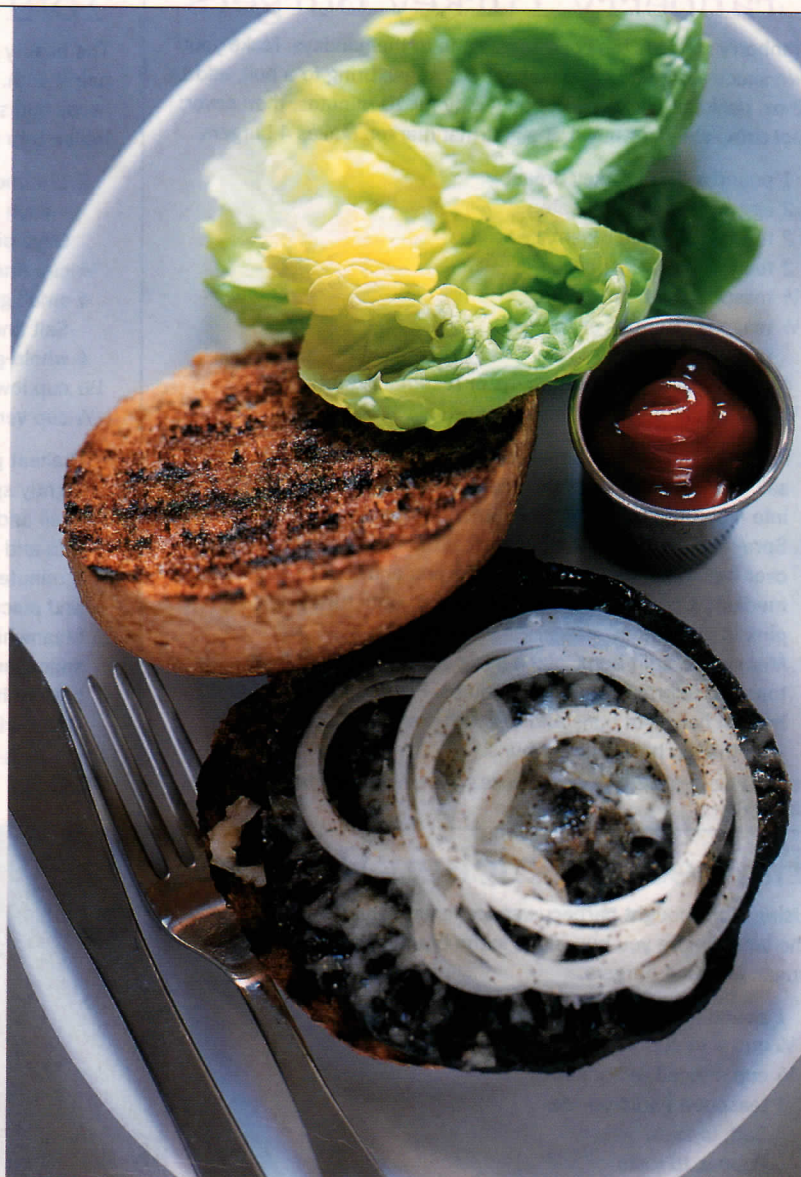
Portobello "Steak" Burgers

These mushrooms are meaty enough to make you feel like you're eating a traditional beef burger. Each burger is topped with cheese before serving — just be sure to shred the cheese finely. It will melt better and cover more of the sandwich than cheese that's shredded coarsely. Makes 4 burgers.

- 4 large portobello mushrooms
(diameter should be at least as large as the rolls)
- Olive oil spray
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 cups finely sliced yellow or white onion
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns or onion rolls
- 2 oz. low-fat mozzarella cheese, finely shredded
- ½ cup steak sauce or ketchup, or to taste (optional)

1. Preheat grill to medium heat.
2. Lightly spray mushrooms with olive oil. Rub them with garlic and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Set aside.
3. Spray a nonstick pan with cooking spray or olive oil. Over medium heat, sauté onions until tender, approximately 5–8 minutes. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.
4. Grill mushrooms until soft, approximately 4 minutes on each side. Meanwhile, split the buns and toast them on the grill, approximately 1–2 minutes. Place the portobellos on the bottom halves of the buns and sprinkle with cheese and the onions. Top with steak sauce or ketchup. Cover with the tops of the buns.

PER SERVING: 314 calories, 13 g protein, 56.5 g carbohydrate, 4 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 9 g fiber



Seared Ahi Burgers with Wasabi Coleslaw

You can grill these burgers to desired doneness, but if you like your ahi burgers rare, make sure that the tuna you've purchased is sushi grade. Makes 4 burgers.

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| ¼ cup light mayonnaise | 1½ pounds sushi-grade ahi tuna file |
| 2 tablespoons prepared wasabi | Olive oil spray |
| 2 tablespoons nonfat milk | Garlic powder, to taste |
| Pinch salt + extra to taste | Pepper, to taste |
| 3 cups chopped red cabbage | 4 whole-grain hamburger buns |

1. Preheat grill on high heat.
2. In a medium bowl, mix the mayonnaise, wasabi, milk and a pinch of salt until well combined. Stir in cabbage.
3. In a large bowl, lightly spray the ahi with olive oil, then lightly sprinkle it with garlic, salt and pepper. Pat the mixture into 4 patties.
4. Grill the ahi burgers 1–2 minutes per side until seared on the outside, but otherwise rare (or cook until completely cooked through, if desired). Meanwhile, split buns and toast on the grill for 1 minute. Place ahi burgers on bottom halves of buns. Top with coleslaw and the remaining halves of the buns.

PER SERVING: 405 calories, 45.5 g protein, 34 g carbohydrate, 9.5 g fat (2 g saturated fat), 4 g fiber

Low-fat condiments like marinara sauce, Dijon mustard and reduced-fat mayo add a zing to these recipes.

Italian Sausage & Pepper Burgers

Don't panic when you see that this recipe calls for pork tenderloin. It's actually a lot leaner than you might think: Three ounces has only 4 grams of fat. Makes 4 burgers.

Olive oil spray

2 medium red or green bell peppers,
or a combination of both, sliced

1 pound ground pork tenderloin

2 teaspoons anise seeds

1 teaspoon Italian seasoning

1 teaspoon crushed red chili
pepper flakes

½ teaspoon garlic powder

½ teaspoon salt

Pepper, to taste

4 whole-grain hamburger buns
or rosemary rolls

1 cup low-fat marinara sauce (optional)

1. Preheat a grill to high heat.
2. Spray a small frying pan with olive oil spray and cook the peppers over medium-high heat until they are tender and the moisture has evaporated. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.
3. In a large bowl, mix the pork, anise seeds, Italian seasoning, pepper flakes, garlic powder, salt and pepper until well combined. Pat meat into patties that are ½-inch larger in diameter than the buns. Place patties on the grill and reduce heat to low. Cook 2–5 minutes per side or until pork is no longer pink in the center.
4. Meanwhile, split the buns and place on grill to toast for approximately 1–2 minutes. Place patties on bottom halves of buns, top with peppers and, if desired, drizzle with sauce. Cover with the tops of the buns.

PER SERVING: 350 calories, 30 g protein, 39 g carbohydrate, 8 g fat (2 g saturated fat), 7 g fiber 

