

The New “Salads”: The Latest in Fast Fraud

PCRM Rates the New Fast-Food and Quick-Serve Salad Entrées

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The latest marketing trend in the fast food industry is the salad entrée, promoted as a “healthy” alternative to fatty burgers and fries. But how healthy are these salads? To see how they stack up nutritionally, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) analyzed them based on five dietary measures. One star was given for meeting each of the following criteria, with five stars signifying the highest rating.

- ☆ One star for \leq 13 g fat
- ☆ One star for \leq 4.5 g saturated fat
- ☆ One star for \leq 50 mg of cholesterol
- ☆ One star for \geq 3 g of fiber
- ☆ One star for \leq 1,000 mg of sodium

Each salad was rated using two ounces of the dressing that it is served with or, if no dressing is recommended, the lowest-fat dressing on the menu. PCRM rated the salad entrées offered at Au Bon Pain, Burger King, McDonald’s, Panera, Subway, Taco Bell, and Wendy’s.

Additionally, PCRM reviewed the amount of calories in each salad. Although calorie content was not one of the five formal criteria, nutritionists highlighted those salads with particularly high calorie content in the written descriptions below.

The report’s results were quite surprising. Only two out of 34 salads received all five stars. Most of the salads were no more healthful than a burger without the bun, dipped in salad dressing. And clear patterns emerged. Salads that relied on fresh vegetables received top billing whereas salads heavy with meat, cheese, or dressing fell flat. **Most shocking of all, McDonald’s Crispy Chicken Bacon Ranch Salad has *more fat and calories and just as much cholesterol as a Big Mac sandwich.***

Unfortunately, very few salads relied on beans (chickpeas, kidney beans, black beans) as a healthy source of protein. A popular item on salad bars, beans would have significantly boosted fiber. If restaurants would replace high-fat toppings, such as chicken and cheese, with cholesterol-free, high-fiber legumes, many more salads would receive five stars.

FAST-FOOD AND QUICK-SERVE SALAD ENTRÉES

Salad	Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sodium (mg)	Number of stars
<i>Au Bon Pain</i>						
Caesar Salad	12 ☆	6	30 ☆	4 ☆	450 ☆	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Charbroiled Salmon Filet & Yellow Peppers Salad	7 ☆	1 ☆	50 ☆	2	215 ☆	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Chef's Salad	15	7	65	3 ☆	1370	1 Star ☆
Chicken Caesar Salad	14	7	70	4 ☆	800 ☆	2 Stars ☆☆
Cobb Salad	22	10	220	8 ☆	1610	1 Star
Garden Salad	4 ☆	1 ☆	0 ☆	5 ☆	480 ☆	5 Stars ☆☆☆☆☆
Mediterranean Chicken Salad	12 ☆	3 ☆	50 ☆	3 ☆	1090	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Mozzarella & Red Pepper Salad	25	16	90	2	460 ☆	1 Star ☆
Nicoise Salad	16	3 ☆	245	4 ☆	1030	2 Stars ☆☆
Thai Chicken Salad	8 ☆	0.5 ☆	45 ☆	4 ☆	1460	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Tomato & Mozzarella Salad with Basil Pesto	19	11	60	3 ☆	260 ☆	2 Stars ☆☆
Tuna Salad	25	4 ☆	10 ☆	6 ☆	960 ☆	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
<i>Burger King</i>						
Chicken Caesar Salad with Creamy Caesar Dressing, Croutons, and Parmesan Cheese	27	7	70	3 ☆	1850	1 Star ☆

Salad	Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sodium (mg)	Number of stars
McDonald's						
Crispy Chicken Bacon Ranch Salad with Newman's Own Ranch Dressing	51	11.5	85	3 ☆	1570	1 Star ☆
Crispy Chicken Caesar Salad with Newman's Own Creamy Caesar Dressing and Croutons	35.5	8	70	3 ☆	1530	1 Star ☆
Crispy Chicken California Cobb Salad with Newman's Own Cobb Dressing	32	8.5	135	3 ☆	1610	1 Star ☆
Grilled Chicken Bacon Ranch Salad with Newman's Own Ranch Dressing	43	9.5	95	3 ☆	1360	1 Star ☆
Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad with Newman's Own Creamy Caesar Dressing and Croutons	26.5	7	80	3 ☆	1320	1 Star ☆
Grilled Chicken California Cobb Salad with Newman's Own Cobb Dressing	23	7.5	140	3 ☆	1400	1 Star ☆
Panera						
Asian Sesame Chicken Salad	15	4* ☆	60	4 ☆	1070	2 Stars ☆☆
Caesar Salad	26	7.2*	110	3 ☆	1130	1 Star ☆
Classic Cafe Salad	36	2.7* ☆	0 ☆	4 ☆	340 ☆	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Fandango Salad	28	5.3*	25 ☆	7 ☆	410 ☆	3 Stars ☆☆☆
Greek Salad	45	16*	10 ☆	5 ☆	1850	2 Stars ☆☆
Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad	27	7.3*	170	3 ☆	1620	1 Star ☆

*The data for these values were either incorrect on the restaurant's Web site or not available. Therefore, we calculated the values by using the nutrient analysis program *Nutritionist V*.

Salad	Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sodium (mg)	Number of stars
Subway						
Meatball Salad with Fat-Free Italian Dressing	20	9	55	4 ☆	1660	1 Star ☆
Subway Club Salad with Fat-Free Italian Dressing	3.5 ☆	1.5 ☆	35 ☆	3 ☆	1720	4 Stars ☆☆☆☆
Veggie Delite Salad with Fat-Free Italian Dressing	1 ☆	0 ☆	0 ☆	3 ☆	920 ☆	5 Stars ☆☆☆☆☆
Taco Bell						
Taco Salad with Salsa	51	14	60	13 ☆	1760	1 Star ☆
Taco Salad with Salsa (w/o shell)	21	10	60	13 ☆	1500	1 Star ☆
Wendy's						
Chicken BLT Salad with Homestyle Garlic Croutons and Honey Mustard Dressing	47.5	12.5	85	4 ☆	1630	1 Star ☆
Mandarin Chicken Salad with Roasted Almonds, Crispy Rice Noodles, and Oriental Sesame Dressing	36.5	4.5 ☆	59.5*	5 ☆	1520	2 Stars ☆☆
Spring Mix Salad with Honey-Roasted Pecans and House Vinaigrette Dressing	44	10	30 ☆	7 ☆	1125	2 Stars ☆☆
Taco Supremo Salad with Taco Chips, Sour Cream, and Salsa	34	14.5	80	10 ☆	1695	1 Star ☆

*The data for these values were either incorrect on the restaurant's Web site or not available. Therefore, we calculated the values by using the nutrient analysis program *Nutritionist V*.

Ratings include salads plus two ounces of the dressing served with it (or the lowest fat dressing offered). Salads averaged around 400 calories with condiments.

☆☆☆☆ **Five Stars = Outstanding**

Au Bon Pain Garden Salad

Au Bon Pain offers a variety of salads, but the Garden Salad is head and shoulders above the rest with no cholesterol and just one gram of saturated fat. Top it with the fat-free raspberry vinaigrette for a sweet, tangy twist.

Subway Veggie Delite with Fat-Free Italian Dressing

The Subway salad receives top honors with zero cholesterol and no saturated fat. It has been on Subway's menu longer than most other salads rated, which signifies staying power. Just remember to order it without the cheese, pile it high with plenty of veggies, and use balsamic vinegar or fat-free Italian dressing.

☆☆☆☆ **Four Stars = Good**

Au Bon Pain Caesar Salad

Asiago cheese, which boosted saturated fat levels, dropped this salad to a four-star rating, but that wasn't its only pitfall. Few people order a Caesar salad without Caesar dressing, which would add 16 *more* grams of fat than the low-fat dressing we included in our chart. We recommend Au Bon Pain's Garden Salad instead.

Au Bon Pain Charbroiled Salmon Filet and Yellow Peppers Salad

A salad without much fiber really isn't much of a salad at all. The Charbroiled Salmon Filet, Yellow Peppers Salad was one of two salads rated that had less than three grams of fiber; the other was Au Bon Pain's Mozzarella & Red Pepper Salad. Blame it on the chain's reliance on salmon, which has no fiber at all.

Au Bon Pain Mediterranean Chicken Salad

Between the feta cheese and the olives, this salad contained far too much sodium to receive five stars.

Au Bon Pain Thai Chicken Salad

Peanut sauce spiked the sodium on this salad, dropping it out of five-star reach. The best bet is to stick with Au Bon Pain's shining star, the classic Garden Salad.

Au Bon Pain Tuna Salad

Tuna salad's biggest downfall is the high-fat combination of fish and mayonnaise—and a mighty downfall it caused. Containing 25 grams of fat, this dish ties with the Tomato and Mozzarella Salad as having more fat than any any other Au Bon Pain salad.

Panera Classic Cafe Salad

This salad came close to receiving five stars, but heavy dressing weighed it down. Making it a five-star salad is as simple as requesting fat-free raspberry vinaigrette instead of the balsamic vinaigrette.

Subway Club Salad with Fat-Free Italian Dressing

While the Subway Club is low in fat and saturated fat, it's too high in sodium to receive five stars. Salty, processed meat is to blame. Skipping the meat can make it a top-rated salad.

☆☆☆ **Three Stars = Marginal**

Panera Fandango Salad

Where this salad goes right is the use of lettuce, oranges, and fat-free dressing. Where it goes wrong is adding cheese and nuts, but this is easily remedied. Simply ask for fewer nuts and leave off the cheese.

☆☆ Two Stars = Poor

Au Bon Pain Chicken Caesar Salad

This salad scored marginally well on fiber and sodium, but is too high in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Blame the combination of chicken and cheese, which brings too much fat and cholesterol to the table.

Au Bon Pain Nicoise Salad

Much like Au Bon Pain's Tuna Salad, the Nicoise Salad's undoing was the tuna, which greatly increases fat and cholesterol levels. In fact, at 245 mg, there was more cholesterol in this salad than any other rated, a dangerous prospect in light of current heart disease rates.

Au Bon Pain Tomato, Mozzarella Salad with Basil Pesto

This salad is light on the vegetables and heavy on the cheese. The result is a dish with too little fiber and 19 grams of fat (11 of them saturated fat), even with fat-free dressing. Add a fatty dressing and the numbers go through the roof.

Panera Asian Sesame Chicken Salad

Chicken, nuts, fried wonton strips, and dressing mean you'll get a bowl of fat, cholesterol, and sodium when good nutrition is your goal. If your heart is set on an Asian-style salad, simply hold the chicken and fried wonton strips, and order the dressing on the side.

Panera Greek Salad

How do you squeeze 45 grams of fat and 480 calories into a salad? Load it down with cheese and heavy dressing. Panera's Greek Salad has more fat and saturated fat than any other salads on the chain's menu. And it ties with Burger King's Chicken Caesar Salad for having the most sodium of all salads rated in this report: 1850 mg.—almost a day's upper limit in *just one meal*.

Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad with Roasted Almonds, Crispy Rice Noodles, and Oriental Sesame Dressing

Too much fat, too much cholesterol, and too much sodium—that's what you get when you add chicken, nuts, fried noodles, and fatty dressing to a salad. Wendy's major mistake was eliminating its salad bar, where patrons could make a healthy, low-fat salad with lots of fruits, vegetables, and beans. Pre-made definitely doesn't mean preferred.

Wendy's Spring Mix Salad with Honey Roasted Pecans and House Vinaigrette Dressing

This salad is almost salvageable, but it'll take a little work. Take off the cheese, add half the pecans, and skip the standard dressing. Instead, use a fat-free dressing or ask for a few lemon wedges to squeeze on top of the salad.

☆ One Star = Unacceptable

Au Bon Pain Chef's Salad

You have to work hard to make a salad this high in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, but Au Bon Pain has done it. Its fiber content saved it from a zero rating, but its bacon, turkey, ham, and cheese make this a nutritional nightmare.

Au Bon Pain Cobb Salad

Chicken, bacon, and cheese doomed the Cobb Salad. While healthy vegetables, such as red peppers and cucumbers, boosted its fiber score, it wasn't quite enough to make up for the 22 grams of fat and 460 calories that weigh it down.

Au Bon Pain Mozzarella & Red Pepper Salad

Why did Au Bon Pain create *two* salads based on mozzarella cheese? With 16 grams of saturated fat, the Mozzarella & Red Pepper Salad tied with Panera's Greek Salad for having the most saturated fat of any salad rated in this report.

Burger King's Chicken Caesar Salad with Creamy Caesar Dressing, Croutons, and Parmesan Cheese

Burger King would have barely earned one star, save for the three grams of fiber found in this salad. But, with 495 calories and 27 grams of fat (seven grams of saturated fat), the Chicken Caesar has more fat and calories than a BK Double Hamburger. But, there's no need to skip BK altogether. Order the BK Veggie, with only seven grams of fat plus a healthy dose of fiber—something chicken or beef can never boast.

McDonald's Salads

When McDonald's introduced a line of salad entrées, many of us wondered. Could customers finally eat well at this fast-food chain? Not quite. PCRM's investigation unearthed some startling findings.

All of McDonald's salads received one star for containing a bare minimum of three grams of fiber; however all contained chicken, which has virtually as much cholesterol as beef. These "salads" may very well clog up your arteries.

- McDonald's Crispy Chicken Bacon Ranch Salad with Newman's Own Ranch Dressing: *Receives the dubious distinction of having the most fat of any other salad rated. At 51 grams of fat and 661 calories, this salad is a diet disaster.*
- McDonald's Grilled Chicken Bacon Ranch Salad with Newman's Own Ranch Dressing: *Even if you opt for grilled over crispy chicken, you're still contending with 43 grams of fat.*
- McDonald's Grilled Chicken California Cobb Salad with Newman's Own Cobb Dressing: *This was the lowest in fat, but it still contains 400 calories, 23 grams of fat, and 7.5 grams of saturated fat.*
- McDonald's Crispy Chicken Caesar Salad with Newman's Own Creamy Caesar Dressing plus Croutons. *Like all McDonald's chicken salads, this one has too much fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.*
- McDonald's Crispy Chicken California Cobb Salad with Newman's Own Cobb Dressing. *Similar to the Crispy Chicken Caesar, but almost twice as much cholesterol!*
- McDonald's Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad with Newman's Own Creamy Caesar Dressing and Croutons. *Despite its healthy-sounding name, this salad is still too high in four of our five criteria.*

Wendy's Chicken BLT Salad with Homestyle Garlic Croutons and Honey Mustard Dressing

Whenever you see a "BLT salad," think "Better Leave This salad." Chicken, bacon, croutons, and a heavy dressing cover this salad with too much fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium.

Wendy's Taco Supremo Salad with Taco Chips, Sour Cream, and Salsa

Does Supremo mean supreme amounts of fat and cholesterol? It does at Wendy's. This salad's only saving grace are the beans in the chili that smothers it. Regrettably, the chili also contains meat, which, along with the chips and sour cream, means this salad is too high in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium to get more than one measly star.

Panera Caesar Salad

This salad contains cheese, cheese-coated croutons, *and* a high-fat dressing. How else could one explain a one-star rating?

Panera Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

What do you get when you add chicken to an already fatty one-star Caesar salad? More fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Steer clear if you care about your waistline and heart.

Subway's Meatball Salad with Fat-Free Italian Dressing

With made-for-you salads available at Subway, why ruin a good thing by dropping fatty meatballs on top of them? It adds way too much of what you don't want. Stick with fresh vegetables, the rare gems of the fast-food game.

Taco Bell Taco Salad with Salsa

Whether you order it with or without the high-fat taco shell, you've still got a one-star salad. With the shell, be prepared to consume 830 calories—the highest for any salad surveyed. To save calories, fat, and cholesterol, skip the shell, substitute refried beans for the beef, and leave off fatty toppings such as cheese and sour cream.