

# No Bun Intended

## The top veggie burgers & nuggets

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

**M**aybe you'd like to eat less meat to lower your risk of heart disease or colon cancer. Maybe you want to curb greenhouse gas emissions from cattle or minimize your risk of food poisoning from *E. coli* O157:H7. Maybe you've heard that some meatless burgers are dead ringers for hamburgers...except that they take just 1 or 2 minutes in the microwave. Or maybe you just don't like the idea of eating animals.

Regardless of what brought you to the veggie "meat" section of the grocery store, here's what to look for once you're there.

The information for this article was compiled by Namita Davis in Toronto.

**1. SEARCH FOR LESS SODIUM.** Salt is the Achilles' heel of veggie meats. Whether it's a meaty beef or chicken wanna-be or a who-cares-about-meat grains-and-veggie patty, sodium levels often reach 400 milligrams or more. Even without a bun—which is likely to add another 300 mg—that's high for a food that typically has just 100 to 200 calories.

Even healthy-sounding brands may trip you up. Take Schneiders Oh Nature!! Meatless Burgers. Despite the "Lifestyle. Better Choices" seal on the box, each 110-gram burger has 450 mg of sodium. That's close to a third of a day's worth. Ditto for each similar-sized serving of PC Blue Menu Meatless Strips.

Yves Veggie Bistro Veggie Mushroom Melt, on the other hand, cuts the sodium to 290 mg. It carries a Heart & Stroke Foundation Health Check symbol. (Products with the symbol have no more than 360 mg of sodium per serving.) Others—like Gardein Ultimate Beefless Burger, Veggie Patch Simulated Chick'n Nuggets, Dr. Praeger's, and Zoglo's—are in the 250-to-350 mg range. They just don't boast about it. Take-home message: check the Nutrition Facts panel, not just the front of the package.

Our Best Bites have no more than 250 mg of sodium. Honourable Mentions have no more than 350 mg. Check the bottom of the page for our taste picks.

**2. CONSIDER PROTEIN.** Don't assume that your veggie burger has as much protein as the hamburger it replaces. A typical 85-gram burger has a little over 20 grams of protein. Veggie burgers range from roughly 5 to 18 grams.

How much protein do you need? The Recommended Dietary Allowance is equal to 0.36 grams per pound of body weight. (Divide your weight in pounds by 3 to get a rough estimate; 40 grams a day for someone who weighs 120 pounds, for example.) However, many experts recommend more protein to help you hang on to muscle as you age. To reach that higher level, divide your weight by 2 (60 grams a day for a 120-pounder). And some researchers argue that older people need 20 to 30 grams of protein in each meal to keep building muscle.

It's hard to get there if your veggie burger has only 5 or 6 grams of protein (unless you're also having a protein-rich food like beans or Greek yogurt). Unfortunately, some of our favourites—like Yves Veggie Bistro Veggie Mushroom Melt and Dr. Praeger's California Style Veggie Burgers—are in that range. If you don't eat much meat, chicken, or seafood, it's worth shooting for veggie burgers that have at least 10 grams of protein. That's what we required in our Best Bites.

**3. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING.** Protein varies so much in veggie burgers because their ingredients range from mostly soy protein concentrate (like Schneiders Oh Nature!!, Gardein, Zoglo's, and most Yves) to mostly vegetables, grains, or seeds (like Dr. Praeger's and Organic Sunshine Burgers).

Before you buy, check the box's Nutrition Facts panel. Our Best Bites have at least 10 grams of protein. Most get that high from added soy protein. You can't go by the product's name. Zoglo's Mixed Vegetable Patties, for example, may sound and look like just veggies, but each one has 10 grams of protein (thanks to its soy).

Wheat gluten is another source of protein in many burgers. If you're gluten intolerant, try Dr. Praeger's Gluten Free California Style Veggie Burgers or the less-exciting-tasting Sol Cuisine (the Almond Grain variety isn't gluten free) or Organic Sunshine Burgers.

**4. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING.** Meat isn't just a good source of protein. It's also rich in nutrients like iron and the B vitamins. Thanks to Health Canada, you'll get both—along with most of the other nutrients in meat, including



**Amy's Texas Burger.** Smoky, slightly sweet. Tastes like it just came off the barbecue.



**Gardein Ultimate Beefless Burger.** Surprisingly "meaty" and juicy...like a real beef burger.



**Zoglo's Mixed Vegetable Patties.** More protein than many other veggie- or grain-filled patties.



**Veggie Patch Simulated Chick'n Nuggets.** The nuggets with the least sodium... and they taste like chicken.

Photos: Namita Davis (bottom), Jorge Bach (top).

**Best Bites** (✓✓) have at least 10 grams of protein, no more than 250 milligrams of sodium, and no more than 1.5 grams of saturated fat. **Honourable Mentions** (✓) have no minimum protein requirement and can have up to 350 mg of sodium. Within each section, products are ranked from least to most sodium, then most to least protein.

## MEATLESS BURGERS & PATTIES

(weight of 1 burger, etc.)

	Calories	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)
✓✓ Dr. Praeger's Gluten Free California Style (78 g) <sup>G</sup>	120	5	180
✓✓ Sol Cuisine Original (71 g) <sup>G</sup>	100	12	220
✓✓ Soyarie—Herba or Miso Tofu (70 g) <sup>1</sup>	120	12	230
✓ Organic Sunshine Burgers South West (75 g) <sup>G</sup>	240	6	240
✓ Organic Sunshine Burgers Barbecue (75 g) <sup>G</sup>	250	9	250
✓ Dr. Praeger's, except Gluten Free California Style (78 g) <sup>1</sup>	110	6	250
✓ Sol Cuisine Sweet Curry Vegetable (71 g) <sup>G</sup>	90	10	280
✓ Sol Cuisine Mushroom Rice (71 g) <sup>G</sup>	90	8	290
✓ Yves Veggie Bistro Veggie Mushroom Melt (88 g)	160	7	290
✓ Gardein Ultimate Beefless (85 g)	140	16	300
✓ Sol Cuisine Almond Grain (71 g)	130	7	310
✓ Soyarie Teriyaki Tofu (70 g)	110	11	320
✓ Organic Sunshine Burgers Garden Herb (75 g) <sup>G</sup>	250	8	320
✓ Zoglo's Tender Meatless (75 g)	120	15	330
✓ Zoglo's Mixed Vegetable Patties (75 g)	130	10	330
✓ Zoglo's Spinach and Vegetable Cutlets (75 g)	100	9	330
Licks Nature (113 g) <sup>†</sup>	230	18	340
✓ Amy's Texas (71 g)	130	12	350
Sol Cuisine Spicy Black Bean (71 g) <sup>G</sup>	90	11	360
Veggie Patch The Ultimate Meatless (71 g)	110	12	390
Yves Veggie Burger (71 g)	110	14	400
Yves Garden Vegetable Patties (75 g)	90	10	410
Amy's California (71 g)	140	6	430
Schneiders Oh Nature! Meatless (110 g)	180	17	450
Yves Prima Veggie (75 g)	120	11	460
Yves The Good Veggie (75 g)	120	14	480
Yves Veggie Bistro Veggie (88 g)	140	13	540
Yves Veggie Bistro Harvest Veggie (88 g)	150	6	570
Kirkland Signature Gardenburger (113 g)*	200	11	610

President's Choice The World's Best Meatless (142 g)*	300	25	750
For comparison: Ground beef, lean (85 g) <sup>G†</sup>	220	23	80

## "CHICKEN" BURGERS & CUTLETS (weight of 1 burger, etc.)

✓ Zoglo's Meatless Chicken Flavour Patties (75 g)	130	15	330
✓ Zoglo's Crispy Meatless Cutlets (75 g)	160	12	330
✓ Zoglo's Tofu Cutlets (75 g)	150	11	330
✓ Zoglo's Tofu & Corn Cutlets (75 g)	160	7	330
Schneiders Oh Nature! Meatless Breaded Chick'n Burgers (88 g)	180	14	420
Yves Veggie Chicken Burgers (75 g)	100	13	420
Yves Veggie Bistro Chicken Burger (88 g)	120	16	490

## "CHICKEN" NUGGETS (number closest to 85 grams)

✓ Veggie Patch Simulated Chick'n Nuggets (4)	170	11	330
✓ Zoglo's Golden Meatless Nuggets (4)	170	13	350
Gardein Seven Grain Crispy Tenders (3)	150	12	360
Schneiders Oh Nature! Meatless Breaded Chick'n Nuggets (4)	160	12	380
Yves Veggie Nuggets (4)	190	12	440

## GROUND & STRIPS (85 grams)

Yves Beef Veggie Tenders	120	23	370
PC Blue Menu Meatless Strips <sup>1</sup>	140	24	380
Gardein Lightly Seasoned Strips <sup>1</sup>	140	24	400
Yves Veggie Ground—Chicken or Round <sup>1</sup>	110	15	470
Yves Teriyaki Chicken Veggie Tenders	130	20	780

## "MEATBALLS," "SAUSAGE," ETC. (number closest to 85 grams, unless noted)

✓ Zoglo's Meatless Mini Loaves (2)	140	15	330
Zoglo's Savoury Meatless Kebabs (2)	130	17	370
Yves Souvlaki Veggie Skewers (1)	120	17	420
Schneiders Oh Nature! Meatless Meatballs (6)	140	14	520
Yves Veggie Meatballs (5)	130	16	540
Yves Veggie Sausage (95 g) <sup>1</sup>	170	21	710

✓✓ Best Bite. ✓ Honourable Mention. <sup>G</sup>Gluten free. <sup>1</sup>Average. \* Contains 2.5 to 3.5 grams of saturated fat. <sup>†</sup> Contains 5 grams of saturated fat.

**Daily Limits** (for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Sodium:** 1,500 milligrams. **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams.

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magnesium, potassium, zinc, and copper—if you buy a simulated veggie meat like Schneiders, Yves, or Zoglo's. Simulated chicken burgers, nuggets, etc., also have to be fortified.

You shouldn't have any trouble finding the beef and chicken clones. The word "simulated" appears on the package. (For some reason, it's missing from the Gardein Ultimate Beefless Burger label.)

The added iron and vitamin B-12 are a plus if you frequently eat meatless burgers (and you don't take a multivitamin). And the added B-12 is important if you're over 50, because some older people can't absorb the naturally occurring B-12 that's bound to the protein in food. That's why it's good to get some B-12 from a multivitamin...or a simulated meat or chicken burger.

Burgers like Dr. Praeger's, which aren't trying to impersonate beef or chicken, aren't fortified.

With one or two exceptions (like Licks Nature Burgers), what you *won't* get from your veggie burger—don't shed a tear—is meat's saturated fat. An 85-gram broiled burger made of "lean" ground beef delivers 5 grams of sat fat (a quarter of a day's worth). Few veggie burgers have more than 1 gram.

**5. WATCH THE SERVING.** The serving size for the nuggets, strips, meatballs, kebabs, and grounds that we looked at ranged from 55 to 100 grams. That can make it tough to shop. For example, the calories, sodium, etc., on the Nutrition Facts panel of Gardein Lightly Seasoned Strips are for a 67-gram serving. But Yves Veggie Tenders use 85 grams, and PC Blue Menu Meatless Strips use 100 grams. To make it easier to compare brands, our chart gives calories, sodium, and protein for a uniform 85-gram serving.

The veggie burgers, sausages, and patties we looked at ranged from 70 grams to 142 grams. We left those servings as is, since you're likely to eat an entire burger or sausage.

**6. TEMPT YOUR TASTE BUDS.** Veggie burgers range from terrific to one-bite-is-enough. We had trouble getting used to several burgers made by Sol Cuisine and Organic Sunshine Burgers, for example. They (and most other burgers) might taste better sautéed in a skillet. We cooked ours in the microwave because it's quickest. (In those few cases where there were no microwave directions, we sautéed.) And breaded chicken patties and nuggets are best when baked in a toaster (or ordinary) oven. 🍷