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BE WELL

## Build a Healthier Burger

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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When considering healthy food options, you probably don't conjure up a nice juicy burger. They just don't scream health food, and if you're picturing the ones served

in most restaurants, then you'd be right. That version is usually laden with excess calories, fat, refined carbohydrates, and sugar.

Fortunately, there are some simple and tasty ways of improving the wellness quotient of your hamburger, so it can be part of a nutritious eating plan. Here are some ideas for crafting a wholesome, hearty burger.

**Meat matters.** Whether your preferred patty is made from meat or is meatless, there are plenty of options. For a leaner, yet still meaty, bite, use ground venison, bison, turkey, or chicken without added fat or skin. When sticking with beef, go for 90%-95% lean. Another alternative would be to mix the lean red meat with turkey or chicken. Since there is a lower total fat and saturated fat content to these choices as compared to 80-20 beef, you may want to combine them with cooked, pureed vegetables such as zucchini, mushrooms, onions, or carrots, to add moisture. Vegetables will contribute to the overall flavor too. When grilling or frying meat or meatless hamburgers, avoid pressing them with a spatula as this releases juices and will make for a drier end result. And dare I say it ... do we really need to consume a burger the size of your face? Form the patty to be the modest size of a deck of cards.

There are many recipes for making your own veggie burger, which is typically healthier than the store-bought variety. These homemade beauties are high in antioxidants, fiber, and protein. Commonly used ingredients include black beans, lentils, sweet potatoes, and quinoa.

**Spice it up.** Spices not only add a bit of punch, but they also boost the health factor too. Fresh or dried herbs fight inflammation and disease, and it couldn't be any easier to usher them into your diet than by way of a burger. Experiment with using a spice blend or just one predominant flavor. Consider chili powder, garlic, cilantro, Italian spices, onion powder or smoked paprika.

**Top it off.** This is where our healthified burger can derail. Between saturating it in sauce, smothering it in cheese, and stuffing it full of fried onion rings, this can be the downfall of what started off on a more nutritious note. To avoid this trap, try swapping salsa for ketchup and guacamole for mayo. Grilled vegetables, such as mushrooms, onions, and peppers, are another topping hit.

**Have fun with the bun.** You can do a whole lot better than a low fiber, white flour bun. While there is nothing wrong with a whole grain roll for cradling your burger, there are many other tasty alternatives. Sandwich that patty between two grilled portobella mushroom caps, zucchini or eggplant rounds, or butternut squash or sweet potato slices. Wrapping it in lettuce or napa cabbage leaves is another low-calorie, low-carb option that is popular.

**Grill Safely.** High-temperature cooking methods, like grilling, have been linked to an increased cancer risk. This is due to the formation of heterocyclic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Either keep the flame low or cook it over a low flame but finish briefly over high heat. Also, those herbs we added for flavor? They do double duty by inhibiting the development of these compounds. It's also important to maintain a separate plate and utensils for raw and cooked meat, use a cooking thermometer to ensure proper internal temperature to avoid food poisoning (160 degrees F for ground beef and 165 degrees F for ground turkey and chicken), and clean the grill after each use.

### **Stacey's Hamburger Seasoning** *(courtesy of All Recipes)*

#### Ingredients:

- 1 T. paprika
- 1-1/4 t. salt
- 1 t. ground black pepper
- 1/2 t. brown sugar
- 1/2 t. garlic powder
- 1/2 t. onion powder
- 1/4 t. ground cayenne pepper

#### Recipe:

1. Add all ingredients to an airtight container.
2. Seal and shake to combine.
3. Store in a cool, dry place between uses.

*Note: Mix this in when forming patties prior to cooking.*

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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