



Better Burgers Bring Flavor, Less Guilt

Ask anyone to name an all-American food that commands almost universal appeal, and the response will likely be the stalwart hamburger. But while the popularity of hamburgers shows no signs of diminishing, an increasing number of consumers are seeking out flavorful variations that provide more healthful alternatives.

“Those of us who grew up with the traditional beef burger have long-lasting memories of their goodness,” says Arlene Spiegel of New York-based restaurant consultancy Arlene Spiegel & Associates. “Consumers are not going to forget or give up on that unique satisfaction that the burger indelibly imprinted on their brain. However, our new desire to ‘eat with a conscience’ has us searching for alternatives to red meat.”

The Patty

Many experts advise starting with the hamburger patty itself. While on the one hand the industry is seeing a rise in the availability of premium proteins, it's also seeing an increase in the menuing of leaner meats and vegetarian alternative proteins.

Spiegel notes that salmon burgers also are growing in popularity. “Salmon is the perfect solution if you want a burger experience without red meat or poultry,” she says. “It’s a play on crab cakes, and goes well with a number of accompaniments, like dill sauce or Moroccan spices.”

The Bun

Adjusting the recipe of the bun is another way to boost a burger’s health halo. Experts advise the use of whole grain or gluten-free flour as well as ancient grains like spelt and amaranth. While these components may add fiber, however, they are not necessarily lower in carbohydrates or calories.

Chefs and restaurateurs must remain careful about choosing the right carrier, however. “Buns are an important part of the overall mouth feel and management of the first to last bite of the burger,” Spiegel says. “If it’s too soft, the juices will be lost and the bun will fall apart. If it’s too tough, the pressure of the bite will squeeze all the juiciness out of the burger.”