

Despite menu changes, fast food still unhealthy

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

Fast food has gotten a little better for you over the last 18 years – except in cases where it's gotten worse.

Among 27 menu items subjected to scrutiny by Tufts University researchers, eight of the offerings contained fewer calories in 2013 than in 1996 and nine contained more. In addition, five of the 18 items tested for sodium content had less of it at the end of the 18-year period and seven had more.

The researchers looked up nutritional information for all of the cheeseburgers, French fries, grilled chicken sandwiches and nondiet sodas sold between 1996 and 2013 at three leading fast-food chains. The restaurants weren't mentioned by name, but one of them was “the top restaurant on the basis of sales” – a designation that describes McDonald's. The other two chains had “similar menu items,” a “national presence” and were “in the top 10 for total U.S. sales revenue” – attributes that describe Burger King and Wendy's. (The researchers, from Tufts' Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging and the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, declined to confirm or deny these identities.)

In general, the calorie content of similar items varied from chain to chain, the researchers found. For instance, an order of small fries at one of the chains packed 110 more calories than an order of small fries at one of the other chains. (The one exception to this trend was large-sized orders of fries.)

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