

## Unhealthy Vegan Food?

I've heard complaints about some local vegan eateries serving “unhealthy” food. One eatery owner was even told he should be “ashamed” of his menu offerings. But in defense of brave vegan restaurateurs willing to forgo clients and profits in order to maintain ethical principles, the fairness of these charges depends on what their food is being compared to.

It may not seem obvious, but vegan eateries have to compete with mainstream eateries for business. In fact, as incredible as it may seem, the majority of vegan restaurant patrons are *not* vegan!

Some may be flexitarians looking for what they perceive to be healthier fare for the evening. Others may think of “vegan” as a new food category—instead of Mexican or Chinese, for example, they'll opt to get Vegan food. Some may be veganish or vegetarians aspiring to go full vegan. Or they may be Kosher Jews seeking assurance that milk and meat will never be mixed—or that pork, shellfish, and other “unclean” foods are off the menu. (Aren't *all* animal products unclean?)

Healthwise from the start, even allowing for identical calorie counts, a no-fiber, high cholesterol, high-saturated fat animal meal is worse than a high-fiber, no-cholesterol, low-saturated-fat vegan meal.



**Animal Burger**  
No fiber  
High cholesterol  
High saturated fat

VS.



**Plant Burger**  
High fiber  
No cholesterol  
Low saturated fat

If the bulk of their customers are indeed omnivorous, to stay in business, vegan eateries must offer full-flavor equivalents to the high fat, salt, and sugar meals popular at mainstream restaurants.

Even Tal Ronnen, the former personal chef to Ellen and Oprah, acknowledges the need to provide full-flavor meals at his renowned Los Angeles fine-dining vegan eatery, Crossroads. You can view him making “Chicken” Scaloppini (using Gardein and Earth Balance) at <http://www.talronnen.com>. The relevant “full-flavor” message starts at about 3:06. [The video no longer appears to be available.]

Admittedly, most vegan restaurant food is decidedly less healthy than what some vegans eat at home. For example, in the last few years, I've converted all my recipes to no-SOS (Salt, Oil, Sugar). If you're interested, visit [www.maxlearning.net/topics/health.htm](http://www.maxlearning.net/topics/health.htm) and scroll down to MaxVegan Recipes.

However, when I go out to eat, my only criterion is that the food be 100% vegan. I know it probably won't be as healthy as my home cooking, but since I average about one restaurant meal per week, I doubt it will have a major impact on my health. In any case, I try to avoid fried and oily foods and tend to favor bean, mushroom, grain, tofu, or tempeh options over processed mock meats.

Of course, vegan restaurants can choose to reduce the SOS and use flavorful spices and nut, tofu, or avocado-based sauces that satisfy vegans and omnivores alike. But if they served only blandly-seasoned, low-fat foods, they'd surely lose many of their non-vegan and non-health-oriented clients.

**Health issues aside, for most vegans, the goal is to feed the world without using animals.**