

The Healthiest Things to Eat at Sweetgreen, According to Dietitians

Plus, what to avoid.



Photo courtesy of Sweetgreen.

There's a lot to love about Sweetgreen: It's fast, provides a fresh menu featuring farm-to-table vegetables and housemade dressings, and has local roots, having been founded by some enterprising undergrads at Georgetown University way back in 2007. Health experts love it, too. "Sweetgreen has some of the best choices for a healthy lunch or dinner, hands-down," say Lisa Muras, RD, and Nadine Jakim Young, MS, RD, CDE of Virginia Hospital Center. "Most salads total between 400 and 500 calories, an affordable calorie allotment for the majority of people. And many feature heart-healthy fats from avocado, nuts, seeds, and fish."

Here, they share the healthiest things to order at Sweetgreen, what to avoid, and how to create a super-healthy salad.

First: A Note on Sodium

"One quibble—and this is an important one—is many of the entrées are quite high in sodium," say Muras and Young. For instance, the Chicken Pesto Parm warm bowl has 1,608 mg of sodium—or 70 percent—of the daily recommendation for sodium proposed by the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommend limiting sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg per day. Too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure and increased risk of cardiovascular disease in adults.

Muras and Young note that other entrées exceeding the 1,000 mg mark include the Hummus Tahina, Kale Caesar, and Shroomami. “The source of the sodium in the salads comes from dressings, along with some of the premiums, including citrus shrimp (430 mg), herb falafel (360 mg) and Parmesan crisps (430 mg), to name a few,” they say. “The good news is you can still enjoy these salads by modifying your order to cut the high sodium culprit and add a lower sodium alternative.” According to the American Heart Association, bread is one of the “Salty Six,” the most common foods that add sodium to diets. By skipping the buckwheat bread available at metro area locations, you can avoid added calories (80) and sodium (230 mg).

Best Warm Bowl: Fish Taco

“This entrée is a delicious option for anyone craving Tex-Mex flavor. Calories clock in at 640 per serving, sodium at 793 mg. Diners can reduce sodium and carbohydrates by swapping the warm quinoa for corn, and bump up the fiber content (which can help with increasing satiety) by adding romaine lettuce to the base. The steelhead fish in the salad is actually a species of trout, but like salmon, it’s a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease when eaten at least once per week.”

Needs Improvement: Shroomami

“While this warm bowl is a good source of plant-based protein, which can be beneficial for helping to prevent diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and overall mortality, it’s fairly high in calories (640), way high in sodium (1,060 mg), and one of the lower fiber choices (8 grams). You can improve the nutrition profile by removing the portobello mix and adding lentils, which ups the protein without too much salt. Throw in some red chili to keep things spicy without adding extra calories.”

Best Signature Salad: Guacamole Greens

“This salad, as ordered, has 530 calories, is the lowest in sodium (565 mg), and includes lean protein (roasted chicken) and a heart healthy fat (avocado), all of which make it a nutrient-dense choice. You can further reduce calories and sodium by removing the tortilla chips and replacing them with shredded cabbage for additional crunch.”

Needs Improvement: Kale Caesar

“This salad is a good option in terms of calories (420), but quite high in sodium (1,130 mg). It also has only three grams of fiber per serving. The two types of Parmesan add a considerable 580 mg of sodium, so swap out the Parmesan crisp for walnuts and add some shredded carrots and beets for additional fiber and color.”

A Dietician-Approved Dream Salad

Muras and Young recommend building your own salad as a great way to control calories and sodium. Try to include protein, greens, and heart-healthy fats. “An example might be kale, baby spinach, cucumber, carrots, spicy broccoli, walnuts, and roasted chicken with the cucumber tahini yogurt dressing, plus a squeeze of lemon. This option gives you great flavor and good fiber at only 355 calories, plus the dressing is the lowest in sodium.”