

Children love to meet, but some want to veg out

It's about time young vegetarians got more choice and better service from the high street fast food chains.

Five young journalists from Plymouth have explored the options for children who want to eat vegetarian fast food. Here they give their opinions on the taste and value of vegetarian burgers available at fast food restaurant chains.

Fast food restaurants are among our favourite places to hang out. The food is quick and convenient, and sometimes even comes with a toy - unless you're a vegetarian. Then it's a very different story. I only needed one bite - I'm definitely not turning vegetarian now.

Surveys have suggested that about 10 per cent of children and teenagers do not eat meat. Carla Balston, 11, is typical. At home she eats bean burgers, Quorn and other meat substitutes.

She said: "When I was nine I understood what actually happened to animals - they get slaughtered just because people want food when they could eat on vegetables instead. I'm veggie because it's evil to eat meat. Animals have to die for it and it's disgusting."

But on a taste tour of Plymouth, would any of the meat-eaters on our team be persuaded to join Carla in a meat-free diet?



We started at Burger King, where we had the choice of vegetable burger and spicy bean burger. The veggie burger was not popular.

"I only needed one bite - I'm definitely not turning vegetarian now," said CE reporter Adam Barnard. The burger is made of carrots, kidney beans and vegetables, wrapped in breadcrumbs. Our panel thought it was soft, soggy, lumpy and cold.

The BK spicy bean burger was more popular.

"It had more flavour and it didn't have a horrible texture," said Carla. It scored over the veggie burger by being crisp on the outside but soft on the inside and not too greasy.

But the price was high - they seemed to us like the burgers you can buy in the supermarkets for 50p each, but this once cost £2.70. The equivalent beef burger costs just £1.60. How can plants be worth more than the death of an animal?

The burger chains have some lessons to learn about catering for young vegetarians.

Photo: FreeFoto.com

Our next stop was children's favourite McDonalds. Ronald offers one option - the Vegetable Deluxe burger, but it was nicer than Burger King's. It had a nice texture, but most of us thought it didn't have much flavour - more taste came from the ketchup, mayonnaise and salad served with it.

Our biggest gripe with McDonalds is that there's no such thing as a Veggie Happy Meal. Happy Meals come with a small burger, chips, drink - and a toy.

Unlike Burger King, McDonald's Veggie burgers don't come in children's sizes, so vegetarian children have to pay for an adult burger (if you ask, they might turn a veggie burger into vegetable nuggets).

The company's head office told us restaurant managers can 'use their discretion'.

Customer Anna Stevens, 11, told us: "McDonald's don't do enough vegetarian meals, and I would like to see a Veggie happy meal."

Wimpy also offers two vegetarian burger options. The spicy bean burger scored the worst of all the burgers we tried - greasy, soggy, and soaked in ketchup.

"It was probably the worst thing I've had today," said reporter Vicky Palmer.

The Quorn burger was very different - crunchy on the outside with a solid meaty texture. The meat eaters among us were convinced, but the true vegetarians complained about the flavour.

"It tasted of chicken and I actually had to spit it out," said Carla, who was upset. "I don't want to be eating a chicken taste - I just can't believe how awful everything is."

Wimpy offered children the most choice - they also offer vegetable and cheese nuggets and a full children's menu.

Our favourite meal was Burger King's Spicy Beanburger, and McDonalds gave the most of us our favourite eating experience.

Our overall view was that vegetarian children are being served poor quality food at high prices.

Young vegetarians we know are put off by most veggie fast food.

We think the restaurants would get more vegetarian customers if they offered more choice.

They should take pride in making sure vegetarian children get the same quality of experience from eating there as meat-eaters - and at the same price.

We can't wait for someone to open a vegetarian burger bar for kids - but in the meantime a Veggie Happy Meal would be a good start.

What the fast food chains said:

Burger King

"All of Burger King's products, including its menu options for vegetarians, are developed through extensive customer consultation. Burger King is the only restaurant chain in the industry to offer a veggie burger endorsed by the Vegetarian Society. We highly value feedback from customers but we recognise we cannot always appeal to very taste.

McDonald's

"We continually review, develop and update our menu, in accordance with customer feedback. We currently have a selection of vegetarian

About the team

This story was produced by Vicky Palmer, 12, Adam Barnard, 14, Stephanie Chapman, 12, and Leah Alford and Victoria Balch, 11. It was published in the [Plymouth Evening Herald](#).

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products including vegetable nuggets on trial in a small number of our restaurants."

Their menu means they only sell 'items that appeal to the majority of our customers.' But they did say children can still get a Happy Meal box and toy with any menu item for 99p.

Wimpy

"We are aware of the reduced choice for our non-meat eating customers and we are actively looking for new products to expand the range. We have tested other non-meat options in the past but unfortunately they did not sell enough to be viable."

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