

“Sandwich” Doesn’t Always Mean Meat



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Meatless sandwiches always appeal. Grilled Cheese is an obvious example. But patrons are asking for other options like avocado, falafel, and soy steak.

Sandwiches are one of those menu categories that are not only popular and versatile, but they also adapt well to meatless preparations. Whether designed for vegetarians or simply those customers who want more variety, meatless sandwiches are rising in popularity.

According to Datassential Creative Concepts, in fact, menu mentions of vegetarian sandwiches grew more than 136% between 2005 and 2016, particularly in fast casual (where they’re on 16.2% of menus), QSR (13.6%), and midscale (9.1%) settings.

- Sandwiches are so familiar to customers that they represent an excellent opportunity for experimentation that’s still relatively risk-free and affordably priced
- They’re versatile enough for lunch, breakfast, dinner, snacks, bar food, and more, for dine-in traffic or takeout
- Sandwiches are great for utilization—roasted vegetables or breakfast eggs, for instance, can be repurposed as a sandwich filling, and prep like sliced tomatoes and other garnishes are often items that are used throughout the menu

Who Needs Meat When You’ve Got...

- Chicken, ham, beef, and turkey are all well and good, but there are plenty of plant-based options that can be used to anchor a meatless sandwich.
- Mushrooms (whole grilled caps, sautéed sliced mushrooms, or the chopped mushroom mixture known as duxelles)

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- Meat substitutes (wheat gluten or seitan, tempeh, tofu, meat analogues such as soy steak)
 - Grilled or roasted vegetables (eggplant, potatoes/sweet potatoes, squash, root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips, cauliflower or broccoli “steaks”)
 - Grilled jackfruit
 - Avocado (sliced or mashed)
 - Black bean patties
 - Veggie burgers
 - Pav (Indian-style mashed potato patties)
 - Mujadara (Syrian-style lentils and rice)

Build a Better Grilled Cheese

- Grilled cheese sandwiches are a staple of lunchtime menus, but they can also be made into signatures.
- Use a blend of different cheese varieties, such as cheddar, mozzarella, and Swiss, for flavor and meltability
- Incorporate an upscale variety such as Gruyere or Brie for adult appeal
- Add jalapeño Jack cheese for a spicy kick
- Global specialty cheeses including Italian Asiago, Spanish Manchego, and French Comte lend sophistication
- Boost flavor, color, and texture with an addition such as bread-and-butter pickles, roasted red peppers, pesto, fig preserves, or olive salad
- Sandwich creamy mac-and-cheese between two slices of grilled Texas toast
- Use spinach, arugula, kale, sautéed peppers and onions, or fresh herbs to “sneak in” some produce
- Try a cheese-based spread such as pimento cheese, beer cheese, or herbed cheese

Celebrate the Classics

- There are plenty of traditional sandwiches that don’t rely on meat to make them craveable.
- Eggplant Parmesan Hero
- Caprese (mozzarella, tomato, basil, and olive oil) on rustic bread or toasted into a panini
- Falafel (fried chickpea patties) with lettuce, tomato, and onion on a pita
- Hummus & Veggie (with cucumbers, tomato, avocado, carrots, and sprouts)

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- Cucumber Tea Sandwich (thinly sliced cucumbers and herbed butter or fresh soft cheese, on lightly toasted brioche)
 - Sweet Specialties (Nutella and banana, PB&J in all its variations, and cream cheese on date and nut bread)

Vary the Format

- Using the same variety of ingredients and assembly techniques that you'd use for a meat-based sandwich also works for vegetarian versions.
- Tartines, bruschetta, smørrebrød, and other European-style open-face sandwiches showcase the beauty and freshness of meatless toppings.
- Wrap sandwiches rolled up in tortillas, pita, or Indian naan bread, lavash, and even lettuce leaves tend to be lower in calories and gluten than regular bread, and are especially mess-free and portable.
- Toasting or grilling sandwiches, especially those that contain cheese, helps meld the ingredients and make the sandwich more comforting.
- Classic club sandwiches layer ingredients to new heights for visual appeal and a sense of value.
- Experiment with different breads, from crunchy multigrain to English muffins, for a different flavor and texture; waffles, bagels, croissants, cornbread, biscuits, and rolls of all kinds (mini-baguette, bulkies, Parker House, pretzel rolls, etc) add a signature touch.

Upgraded Egg Sandwiches

- Eggs are a natural for vegetarian sandwich options, and upgrading them beyond the usual egg-and-cheese formula helps create an all-day specialty.
- Scrambled eggs, fontina cheese, and caramelized onions on grilled sourdough
- Folded thin omelet with hot sauce and American cheese on brioche
- Sautéed peppers and eggs with spinach, provolone, and chopped fresh tomato sauce on a hoagie roll
- Sliced hard-cooked eggs, pickled peppers, and roasted garlic mayo on toasted white
- Sunnyside egg, sautéed broccoli rabe, and fresh ricotta on ciabatta
- Egg salad with chopped radishes, roasted butternut squash, feta, black olives, capers, pickled onions, parsley, and spicy aioli on focaccia

Sources: Datassential Creative Concepts, January 2016, "Modern Vegan & Vegetarian"; Datassential Keynote Report, Sandwiches, September 2014; Datassential CPP 2016, "Alternative Proteins: Consumer Insights" (with IFMA)"

MAKE IT A COMBO WITH BEVERAGES

Meatless sandwiches of all types pair well with beverages from the Nestlé Professional family of brands. Consider offering a combo meal of a sandwich and a hot or cold beverage, including:

- [Specialty coffee](#)
- [Ice blended beverages](#) and smoothies
- [Enhanced waters](#)
- [Iced coffee](#)
- [Brewed coffee](#)
- [Juice](#)
- [Lemonade](#)
- [Iced tea](#)
- [Cold brew coffee](#)

GET STARTED

- [Stouffer's® White Cheddar Macaroni and Cheese](#) makes a mean grilled cheese sandwich variation
- [Minor's® Flavor Concentrates](#) can be added to mayonnaise, sour cream, yogurt, butter, or cream cheese to create a flavorful condiment for meatless sandwiches
- For a Veggie Reuben, replace meat with vegetables, such as thinly sliced roasted beets or broccoli, or smoked portobello mushrooms, plus the usual Swiss, sauerkraut, and Russian dressing
- Add flavor, texture, and freshness with additions such as housemade pickles or relish, kimchi or coleslaw, grainy mustard, potato chips or fries in the sandwich, fruit (apple slices, dried fruit, or fruit butter), tapenade, hummus, or sliced red peppers or cucumbers

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