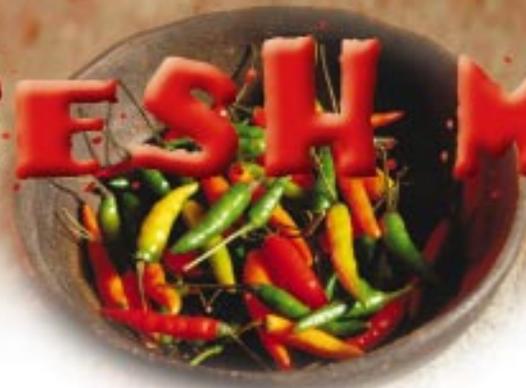


# FRESH MEX



■ **Size.** It's not unusual to find burritos, nachos, quesadillas, and platters with more than 1,000 calories at fresh-Mex restaurants. That's because you're getting calorie-dense ingredients like tortillas, guacamole, cheese, and chips. In many cases, you're also getting a pound or two of food. Solution: Order carefully. If your plate still holds 1,000 calories or more, take half home.

■ **Saturated Fat.** It's not just the steak and pork, but the cheese and sour cream that can boost the sat fat. You can dodge much of it if you skip them. Our Better Bites have no more than five grams of saturated fat (three grams for smaller dishes like tacos).

■ **Salt.** Mexican restaurant food is salty. And that's a shame. More than half of all Americans have high blood pressure by the time they reach age 60. And hypertension raises the risk of heart attacks and strokes. That's why experts recommend that we eat no more than 2,400 milligrams (and ideally no more than 1,500 mg) of sodium a day. You can reach 2,400 mg with one chicken burrito.

Unfortunately, there's no way to dodge the sodium. It's in the beans and the marinated chicken and meat, the tortillas and the rice, even the guacamole and the salsa. Except for a handful of items—like Rubio's HealthMex Grilled Fish or Chicken Tacos—all fresh Mex is salty.

Had we set a sodium limit, there would be little to recommend. That's why we awarded no *Best Bites*. You can use our *Better Bites* to limit saturated fat, but the only way to avoid the salt in fresh Mex is to eat it less often.

BY JAYNE HURLEY & BONNIE LIEBMAN

"No freezers. No microwaves. No can openers. No lard. No MSG."

Baja Fresh's promises—and its food—have apparently struck a chord. It and cousin Chipotle are two of the fastest growing Mexican restaurant chains in the U.S., and the two market leaders have plenty of regional competition, including West Coast-based Rubio's and La Salsa.

These "fresh Mexican grills" have obvious appeal: Their speedy, inexpensive, and zesty dishes make burgers and fries seem duller than dog food. Beans, grilled chicken and seafood, avocado, tomatoes, onions—fresh Mex certainly has the makings of a vegetable-rich, high-fiber, low-saturated-fat meal. But only if you steer clear of the pitfalls.

*The information for this article was compiled by Sarah Wade, with help from Heather Jones.*

(tortilla, chicken, rice, beans, cheese, and salsa) has nearly 1,000 calories, a day's worth of sodium (2,500 mg), and half a day's saturated fat (12 grams). You can save six of those sat fat grams if you hold the cheese, but you'll still be getting 850 calories. That's partly because the (white-flour) tortilla has 340 calories (not to mention two grams of sat fat and 860 mg of sodium).

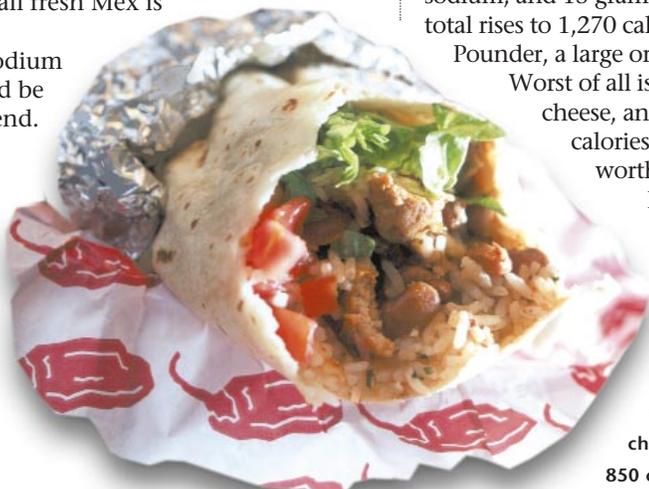
Interested in a Vegetarian Burrito (tortilla, rice, beans, cheese, guacamole, and salsa)? Think of its 1,120 calories, 2,270 mg of sodium, and 14 grams of sat fat as an overstuffed corned beef sandwich *plus* 350 calories.

The Vegetarian is almost as bad as the Barbacoa Burrito (tortilla, shredded beef, rice, beans, cheese, and salsa), with 1,120 calories, 2,870 mg of sodium, and 15 grams of sat fat. Add sour cream and guacamole and the total rises to 1,270 calories and 16 grams of sat fat. That's a Quarter Pounder, a large order of fries, and a large Coke.

Worst of all is the Carnitas Burrito (tortilla, pork, rice, beans, cheese, and salsa). Its pork may be "free-range," but the 1,130 calories, the (gulp) 3,050 mg of sodium, and the day's worth of sat fat (19 grams) are no free lunch.

If you want to leave Chipotle without an extra 1,000 calories under your belt, here are a few options:

**Fill 'er Up.** A typical Chipotle chicken burrito has roughly 1,000 calories, a day's worth of sodium (2,500 mg), and half a day's saturated fat (12 grams). Getting it with no cheese cuts the sat fat in half, but you still get 850 calories.



Photos: FoodPix (top), Chipotle (bottom).

■ **Get your burrito without cheese or sour cream.** No cheese saves about 150 calories and (more importantly) six grams of sat fat. Chipotle has no numbers, but other chains say that a one-ounce gob of sour cream adds 60 calories and three grams of sat fat. If you need more zip, add extra salsa or (if you can afford 150 calories) guacamole. No cheese or sour cream brings a **Chicken Burrito** down to 850 calories and six grams of sat fat. Dropping the rice probably cuts about 200 more calories.

■ **Take home half** of your burrito. Ask your server to wrap the two halves separately.

■ **Go with a Burrito Bol**—a burrito without the 340-calorie tortilla. If you stick to chicken and no cheese or sour cream, you could walk away with “just” 630 calories. Better yet, swap the rice for romaine lettuce. A Burrito Bol with chicken, beans, salsa, and lettuce has an impressive 13 grams of fiber and just 430 calories and four grams of sat fat (it still has 1,600 mg of sodium). If your salad needs more oomph, add half a side of guacamole.

## Chipotle

Better Bite entrees have no more than 5 grams of saturated plus trans fat. Within each section, items are ranked from least to most sat fat, then calories.

### Burritos, etc.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat* (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
✓ Chicken Burrito Bol (with black beans, lettuce, and salsa) (12 oz.)	430	13	4	13	1,600
✓ Chicken Burrito Bol (with black beans, rice, and salsa) (13 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	630	13	4	13	NA
Chicken Burrito (with black beans, rice, and salsa) (17 oz.)	850	23	6	14	1,990
Chicken Burrito (with black beans, rice, cheese, and salsa) (17 oz.)	990	31	12	14	2,490
Chicken Soft Tacos (with cheese, lettuce, and salsa) (3—12 oz.)	710	31	14	8	1,770
Vegetarian Burrito (with black beans, rice, cheese, guacamole, and salsa) (20 oz.)	1,120	42	14	20	2,270
Barbacoa Burrito (with pinto beans, rice, cheese, and salsa) (20 oz.)	1,120	35	15	14	2,870
Barbacoa Burrito (with pinto beans, rice, cheese, guacamole, sour cream, and salsa) (23 oz.)	1,270	45	16	16	2,830
Carnitas Burrito (with pinto beans, rice, cheese, and salsa) (19 oz.)	1,130	45	19	13	3,050

### Side Orders

Guacamole (3 oz.)	150	8	1	6	370
Flour Tortilla (4 oz.)	340	9	2	2	860

✓ **Better Bite.** \*Saturated fat numbers include artery-clogging trans fat. <sup>1</sup> *Nutrition Action* estimate. NA Number not available. Note: Numbers for black and pinto beans are similar.

**Daily Values** (daily levels for a 2,000-calorie diet): *Total Fat*: 65 grams. *Saturated + Trans Fat*: 20 grams. *Fiber*: 25 grams. *Sodium*: 2,400 mg. **Sources:** Chipotle and independent laboratory analyses.

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**B**aja Fresh started—where else?—in California. But the chain, now owned by Wendy's,

has 250 outlets in 23 states. Like other fresh-Mex restaurants, it's clearly a cut above fast food. McDonald's and Wendy's may be working on their salads, but fresh-Mex chains have more beans, more fresh grilled seafood and chicken, and more vegetables, from the peppers and onions to the tomato-rich salsa and the avocado in the guacamole.

That doesn't mean you'll do fine with anything on the menu, though. The sodium is still through the roof, and the calories can easily exceed 1,000.



Take Baja's burritos. Nearly all have at least 800 calories wrapped up with 1,600 to 2,000 mg of sodium and 15 to 20 grams of saturated fat. That's roughly two Quarter Pounders.

**Baja in Calories.** The average Baja Ensalada has around 300 calories and two grams of sat fat. Two dressings—Salsa Verde or Avocado Salsa—add only 20 to 30 calories, leaving sodium (1,400 mg or so) as the only problem.

Exceptions: On the lighter side, a cheese-free Burrito Mexicano knocks the sat fat down to three grams (chicken) or six grams (steak). On the heavier side, you can order any burrito “Enchilado Style,” which means chips, melted cheese, sour cream, and salsa on the side. It also means an *additional* 930 calories, 21 grams of sat fat, and 1,760 mg of sodium.

Most of the landscape beyond burritos is equally foreboding.

Whether it's taquitos (fried corn tortillas filled with chicken or steak and cheese, served with beans or rice, guacamole, sour cream, and salsa) or a tostada “salad” (deep-fried flour tortilla filled with shredded lettuce, beans, guacamole, sour cream, cheese, salsa, and—if you want—chicken or steak), you're still talking two Quarter Pounders. Chicken enchiladas (with rice and beans) are more like a Big Mac plus 200 calories.

Should you stray into quesadilla and nachos territory, McDonald's starts to look like spa food. A quesadilla is essentially a grilled cheese sandwich on a tortilla instead of bread, embellished with guacamole, sour cream, salsa, and (if you wish) chicken, steak, or grilled vegetables. It may look innocent, but it adds up to roughly 1,200 calories, 2,400 mg of sodium, and 36 grams of saturated fat (nearly two days' worth). That's three Quarter Pounders....plus an extra half day's sat fat. It's like eating a New York strip steak, a Caesar salad, and a baked potato with butter.

No one would confuse nachos with diet food, especially when the fried corn chips are served with cheese, guacamole, sour cream, salsa, and (if you'd like) chicken or steak. But 2,000 calories and 40 grams of saturated fat seasoned with



2,900 mg of sodium is roughly four Quarter Pounders. It's a day's worth of food with two days' worth of sat fat.

Don't get us wrong. Baja does have dishes for people who want to live past 65. Among them:

■ **Ensaladas.** You can get a **Baja Ensalada** salad with chicken, steak, or (breaded) fish. And last summer, the chain introduced two new Ensaladas—Mahi Mahi (on the West Coast) and Shrimp—as part of its Lighten Up seasonal menu, which could become permanent if sales are strong. Most Ensaladas have about 300 calories (the steak has 460 and the shrimp 180) and no more than four grams of saturated fat (seven for the steak). And Baja's delicious fat-free Salsa Verde or Avocado Salsa dressing adds only 20 to 30 calories. But with more than 1,000 mg of sodium per salad (not including dressing), the Ensaladas aren't perfect. (Interestingly, the Lighten Up menu lists calories, fat, fiber, and protein for its seven dishes, but not sodium.)

■ **Tacos.** A single **Baja Style Taco**—chicken, shrimp, mahi mahi, steak, or breaded fish—keeps the calories in the 200s, the sat fat at two grams or less, and the sodium in the 300-to-500-mg range. A lone taco will leave most people hungry, but if you can get by with two, that's not a bad lunch. Baja's Lighten Up menu also offered a pair of **Grilled Veggie Tacos**, with 420 calories and three grams of sat fat. But there's no excuse for the 1,100 mg of sodium.

■ **Taco Combos.** All of Baja's **Taco Combo Plates** are reasonably low in saturated fat. Each comes with your choice of two tacos (chicken, shrimp, mahi mahi, breaded fish, or steak) plus rice, beans, and chips. The good news is that the beans are loaded with (a day's worth of) fiber. The bad news is that they've got 850 to 1,000 calories and roughly 2,000 mg of sodium.

You can cut the sodium by almost 500 mg if you order a **Tres Tacos Combo** (because you're trading rice and beans for a third taco plus guacamole). As long as at least two of your three tacos are chicken or shrimp, the sat fat will be relatively low. But you're still talking 800 to 1,000 calories.

■ **Bare Burritos.** Last summer, Baja offered a tortilla-less Bare Burrito (chicken, rice, beans, grilled peppers and onions, pico de gallo, and dressing) served in a bowl. The **Vegetarian Bare Burrito** substitutes cheese and lettuce for chicken. Having no tortilla brings the calories down to the 550-to-650-mg range, and the sat fat to a rock-bottom-low two grams. If only the sodium were under 2,000 mg.

■ **Baja Chicken Fajitas without sour cream.** Baja's fajitas—sizzling chicken, onions, and peppers served with soft flour or corn tortillas, with beans, rice, guacamole, sour cream, and salsa on the side—are far from perfect. The calories hover around 1,300 and the sodium is off the charts (roughly 3,000 mg). But if you skip the sour cream and guacamole, the sat fat simmers down to two grams (if you get corn tortillas) or five grams (if you go with fattier flour tortillas).

Photo: FoodPix.



## Baja Fresh

Better Bite entrees and combos have no more than 5 grams of saturated fat (or 3 grams of sat fat for a single taco or mini tostadita). Except where noted, numbers don't include the chips that come with most items. If you get them, add the numbers for "Chips" in the Side Orders section. Within each section, items are ranked from least to most sat fat, then calories.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
<b>Tacos &amp; Taquitos</b>					
✓ Baja Style Taco (4 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	200	6	1	3	320
✓ Mahi Mahi or Baja Fish Taco (6 oz.) <sup>2</sup>	270	12	2	5	470
✓ Grilled Veggie Tacos (2—14 oz.)	420	10	3	14	1,100
Taco Chilito (8 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	360	14	6	9	630
Taquitos (with guacamole, sour cream, and rice or beans) (3—16 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	770	39	14	15	1,580
<b>Burritos</b>					
✓ Bare, Vegetarian (20 oz.)	560	8	2	22	2,040
✓ Bare (22 oz.)	650	7	2	22	2,410
✓ Mexicano, Chicken (18 oz.)	830	13	3	20	2,110
Mexicano, Steak (18 oz.)	920	20	6	19	2,120
Bean and Cheese (14 oz.)	870	31	15	20	1,640
Bean and Cheese, Chicken (18 oz.)	1,000	33	15	21	2,080
Grilled Vegetarian (18 oz.)	830	32	16	16	1,730
Baja (16 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	870	39	16	10	2,000
Ultimo (17 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	970	39	18	9	2,060
Bean and Cheese, Steak (18 oz.)	1,100	41	19	20	2,090
Dos Manos (33 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,590	49	21	27	3,730
Dos Manos, Enchilado Style (62 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	3,370	157	63	43	6,230
To make any burrito (except Dos Manos) Enchilado Style, add...	930	55	21	10	1,760
<b>Salads</b>					
✓ Baja Ensalada, except Steak (20 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	280	9	2	8	1,120
✓ Side-By-Side (14 oz.)	320	6	2	6	1,300
Mini Tosta-Dita (12 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	600	20	5	13	1,560
Baja Ensalada, Steak (18 oz.)	460	18	7	5	1,250
Tostada (27 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,130	54	15	29	2,290
<b>Dressing (4 Tbs.)</b>					
Salsa Verde	20	0	0	0	290
Avocado Salsa	30	3	0	1	200
Ranch	220	19	4	0	440
Olive Oil Vinaigrette	230	25	4	0	230
<b>Nachos &amp; Quesadillas (with guacamole and sour cream)</b>					
Quesadilla (20 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,230	72	36	10	2,430
Nachos (30 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	2,000	107	39	33	2,890
<b>Enchiladas (with rice, beans, and sour cream)</b>					
✓ Verano (21 oz.)	580	9	3	21	2,140
Verdes, Vegetarian (23 oz.)	750	25	12	21	2,480



Ralph Rubio first discovered the fish taco when he spent his spring

break from college in the Baja California village of San Felipe in Mexico. Now he has more than 140 restaurants serving a full Fresh Mexican Grill menu to residents of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah.

Like some competitors, Rubio's promises no MSG, no lard, freshly made salsa, guacamole, and beans that are never refried. And the chain offers delicious grilled seafood, chicken, and vegetables that you'd never find in a fast-food joint.

But you still have to dodge the quesadillas—tortillas stuffed with saturated fat. They average 28 grams of sat fat (1½ days' worth) plus 900 calories and 1,900 mg of sodium. Each is like a Porterhouse steak smothered in salt.

Rubio's Cheese Nachos Grande has 1,270 calories, 27 grams of saturated fat, and 1,800 mg of sodium. What do you expect from tortilla chips covered with melted cheese, beans, sour cream, guacamole, and salsa?

And watch out for the Combos, which add chips and beans to two tacos, three taquitos, or one burrito plus taco. Most combos have at least 1,000 calories, nine grams of sat fat, and 1,500 mg to 3,100 mg of sodium. Just run-of-the-mill Mexican food.

The Baja Especial Combos and Baja Grill Combos are in a class by themselves. With 1,400 to 1,700 calories, 13 to 19 grams of sat fat, and 2,900 to 3,900 mg of sodium, they set you up for your own Coronary Combo (a heart attack with a stroke on the side).

The numbers are outrageous because the Baja Especial and Baja Grill Combos each includes a burrito (along with a fish taco, beans, and chips). And each burrito packs 600 to 950 calories, seven to 13 grams of sat fat, and 1,700 to 2,700 mg of sodium.

Like most fresh-Mex chains, Rubio's does sell some items for folks who aren't itching to visit a cardiologist:

■ **HealthMex.** The HealthMex menu offers burritos, tacos, and one combo with less fat and calories (and, in a few cases, sodium). Where else can you find a burrito for roughly 500 calories, no more than three grams of sat fat, and—drumroll, please—a whole-wheat tortilla? Choose from grilled chicken, mahi mahi, or vegetables. (Each comes with a 110-calorie side order of rice—in addition to the rice in the burrito. Skip it.)



**Almost Healthy Mex.** Rubio's HealthMex Burritos (grilled chicken, mahi mahi, or vegetables plus rice, beans, and salsa in a whole-wheat tortilla) average only 500 calories and 2 grams of saturated fat. If the company could only cut the 1,300 mg of sodium.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
Verdes, Chicken (22 oz.)	800	26	12	20	2,660
Chicken (21 oz.)	810	28	12	20	2,370
Steak (23 oz.)	920	36	17	20	2,560
Verdes, Cheese (20 oz.)	870	38	19	19	2,470
Cheese (20 oz.)	880	40	19	19	2,340

**Side Orders**

Chips (1 oz., about 12 chips)	150	7	1	2	40
Rice (6 oz.)	280	4	1	4	980
Black or Pinto Beans (11 oz.) <sup>2</sup>	340	2	1	24	980
Guacamole, small (3 oz.)	110	9	2	6	280
Pronto Guacamole with chips (6 oz.)	550	30	4	11	380
Guacamole, large (8 oz.)	290	25	5	16	750

**Baja Fajita Combos** (with sour cream, guacamole, rice, and beans, unless noted)

✓ Chicken with 3 corn tortillas, no sour cream or guacamole (29 oz.)	1,000	13	2	30	2,430
✓ Chicken with 3 corn tortillas, no sour cream (32 oz.)	1,110	22	4	36	2,710
✓ Chicken with 4 flour tortillas, no sour cream or guacamole (30 oz.)	1,160	21	5	26	2,960
Chicken with 3 corn tortillas (34 oz.)	1,200	29	9	36	2,780
Chicken with 4 flour tortillas (34 oz.)	1,360	37	12	32	3,310
Steak with 3 corn tortillas (34 oz.)	1,370	42	15	33	2,830
Steak with 4 flour tortillas (33 oz.)	1,530	50	18	30	3,350

**Taco Combo Plate** (2 Baja Tacos with rice, beans, and chips)

✓ Taco Combo Plate (20 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	920	26	4	25	1,840
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**Tres Tacos Combos** (3 Baja Style Tacos with guacamole and chips)

✓ 3 Chicken (15 oz.)	790	28	3	18	1,160
✓ 3 Shrimp (16 oz.)	790	28	3	15	1,280
✓ 2 Chicken or Shrimp & 1 Fish, Mahi Mahi, or Steak (17 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	840	32	4	17	1,280
✓ 2 Mahi Mahi, 1 Chicken (23 oz.)	930	38	5	22	1,460
✓ 2 Mahi Mahi, 1 Shrimp (23 oz.)	930	38	5	21	1,500
✓ 1 Chicken, 1 Fish, 1 Mahi Mahi (20 oz.)	940	41	5	19	1,480
3 Mahi Mahi (26 oz.)	1,000	43	6	24	1,610
3 Steak (15 oz.)	880	34	8	15	1,130
3 Fish (18 oz.)	1,030	52	8	15	1,670

✓ Better Bite. <sup>1</sup>Average of the entire line. <sup>2</sup>Average of the items listed.

**Daily Values** (daily levels for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Total Fat:** 65 grams.

**Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Fiber:** 25 grams. **Sodium:** 2,400 mg.

Source: Baja Fresh Mexican Grill.

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Photo: Martin LefPire.





**The HealthMex Tacos—**  
Chicken or Mahi Mahi—come without cheese or guacamole,

so they're lower in calories, saturated fat, and sodium than Rubio's regular tacos. Two HealthMex Mahi Mahi Tacos will cost you only 360 calories, two grams of sat fat, and—here's the best part—210 mg of sodium.

Rubio's sells a **HealthMex Combo** (a HealthMex Chicken Burrito plus a HealthMex Mahi Mahi Taco, with rice and beans) that's definitely not for light eaters. It'll add 950 calories to your frame and 2,530 mg of sodium to your blood pressure. But its four grams of sat fat is a fraction of what you'd get in the chain's *regular* combos.

■ **Lobster Burrito.** Grilled lobster, guacamole, beans, rice, salsa, lobster sauce, and no cheese keep the calories around 700 and the sat fat at five grams.

■ **Salads.** Rubio's appropriately named **Sunsational Salad** (grilled chicken, cheese, romaine lettuce, cabbage, onions, tomatoes, and salsa) has only 280 calories, five grams of sat fat, and 950 mg of sodium if you use the fat-free Grape Serrano dressing. (Add 100 calories—and two grams of sat fat—if you go with Creamy Avocado instead.) Skip the cheese and you lose all five grams of sat fat. In fact, if you ask Rubio to hold the cheese, you can turn two other dishes into Better Bites. As you can guess from the ingredients, the **Grilled Chicken Chopped Salad** (chicken, romaine, cabbage, tortilla strips, salsa, and chipotle dressing) and **Grilled Chicken Grande Bowl** (chicken, cabbage, rice, beans, salsa, guacamole, and creamy chipotle sauce) have plenty of flavor without cheese.

**Rubio's**

Better Bite entrees and combos have no more than 5 grams of saturated fat (or 3 grams of sat fat for a single taco). If you eat the chips that come with the burritos and quesadillas, add the numbers from "Chips" in the Side Orders section. Within each section, items are ranked from least to most sat fat, then calories.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
<b>Tacos &amp; Taquitos</b>					
✓ HealthMex Taco (5 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	180	3	1	2	190
✓ The Original Fish Taco (5 oz.)	300	16	3	2	280
✓ Chicken Taquitos (3—8 oz.)	330	13	3	5	400
Chicken or Carne Asada Taco (6 oz.) <sup>2</sup>	270	13	4	2	470
Fish Taco Especial (6 oz.)	370	21	5	3	360
<b>Burritos</b>					
✓ HealthMex, no side of rice (15 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	520	10	2	14	1,320
✓ Lobster (17 oz.)	720	27	5	13	1,890
Grilled Shrimp (14 oz.)	690	27	8	10	1,900
Fish (16 oz.)	830	42	8	12	1,570
Grilled Mahi Mahi (14 oz.)	710	34	9	5	1,190
Baja Especial (20 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	930	35	9	12	2,500

Photo: FoodPix.

	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
Baja Grill (13 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	660	30	12	5	1,970
Bean and Cheese (15 oz.)	830	37	20	15	1,950

**Salads & Bowls** (numbers include dressing)

✓ Sunsational Salad with Serrano Grape Dressing, no cheese (17 oz.)	180	1	0	6	730
✓ Grilled Chicken Chopped Salad, no cheese (15 oz.)	440	24	4	7	1,240
✓ Grilled Chicken Grande Bowl, no cheese (19 oz.)	610	22	4	13	1,710
✓ Sunsational Salad with Serrano Grape Dressing (18 oz.)	280	10	5	6	950
Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad (17 oz.)	710	53	7	7	1,770
Grilled Chicken Chopped Salad (16 oz.)	540	33	9	7	1,460
Grilled Chicken Grande Bowl (20 oz.)	710	31	9	13	1,930
Grilled Carne Asada Grande Bowl (20 oz.)	770	37	12	13	2,350

**Nachos & Quesadillas** (with guacamole and sour cream)

Quesadilla (14 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	920	57	28	4	1,880
Nachos Grande (18 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,350	82	29	20	2,250

**Side Orders**

Rice with HealthMex items (3 oz.)	110	2	0	1	320
Rice (8 oz.)	290	5	0	3	850
Chips (1.5-oz. bag)	210	11	1	3	240
Black or Pinto Beans (8 oz.) <sup>2</sup>	240	3	1	15	840
Side Salad, no dressing (6 oz.)	80	4	2	3	230
Guacamole, small (4 oz.)	190	17	4	5	160
Guacamole, large (8 oz.)	370	34	6	11	240

**Combos** (numbers include chips and beans)

✓ HealthMex Combo (HealthMex Chicken Burrito and HealthMex Mahi Mahi Taco with rice and no chips) (27 oz.)	950	18	4	23	2,530
Taquito Combo (3 Chicken Taquitos with rice and guacamole) (19 oz.)	980	36	6	19	1,770
#1 Combo (2 Original Fish Tacos) (17 oz.)	1,100	52	9	17	1,500
Dos Tacos Combo (2 Chicken, Carne Asada, or Original Fish Tacos) (18 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,060	47	10	17	1,750
Lobster Combo (Lobster Burrito and Original Fish Taco) (29 oz.)	1,520	63	11	28	3,110
Pesky Combo (2 Fish Tacos Especial) (19 oz.)	1,240	62	13	19	1,660
Cabo Combo (Grilled Shrimp Burrito and Original Fish Taco) (26 oz.)	1,490	63	14	25	3,120
Baja Especial Combo (Baja Especial Chicken or Carne Asada Burrito and Original Fish Taco) (32 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,730	71	14	27	3,720
Baja Grill Combo (Baja Grill Chicken or Carne Asada Burrito and Original Fish Taco) (25 oz.) <sup>1</sup>	1,460	66	17	20	3,190

✓ **Better Bite.** <sup>1</sup>Average of all varieties. <sup>2</sup>Average of the items listed.

**Daily Values** (daily levels for a 2,000-calorie diet): **Total Fat:** 65 grams. **Saturated Fat:** 20 grams. **Fiber:** 25 grams. **Sodium:** 2,400 mg.

Source: Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill.

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If you live in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Nevada, Ohio, or Texas, you may have had the chance to “Keep life FRESH. Keep it Exciting,” by visiting one of La Salsa’s Fresh Mexican Grills. That’s fine...as long as you remember that “fresh” doesn’t always mean “healthy.”

You can still line your arteries with the 31 grams of saturated fat (1½ days’ worth) in that 1,000-calorie order of quesadillas. You can still pad your backside with the 1,500 calories’ worth of nachos that also supply nearly 30 grams of sat fat and a day’s worth of sodium (2,300 mg). Would you order 3½ Quarter Pounders as an appetizer?

The smallest La Salsa platter—two soft chicken tacos with beans, rice, and chips—will run you 1,100 calories and at least half a day’s sat fat. The scariest—two taquitos and one quesadilla—racks up 2,000 calories and two days’ sat fat (40 grams), sprinkled with 3,600 mg of sodium. It’s not a platter, it’s an eating contest to see who can finish off five Quarter Pounders.

La Salsa’s burritos pack about 700 to 800 calories—some-what less than other chains’. But the sat fat is still 10 to 15 grams and the sodium tops 1,500 mg. Beware El Champion Burritos. Unless you’ve got a champion cardiac surgeon, you won’t want the 22 grams of sat fat or the 3,500 mg of sodium. And who can afford 1,500 calories in one burrito? That’s more than you’d get in two Pizza Hut Personal Pan Pepperoni Pizzas, for heaven sake.

Where does that leave La Salsa customers who want fresh Mex without a bellyful of calories and saturated fat?

■ **Mexico City Tacos.** “Mexico City” style apparently means no cheese. That explains why either a single chicken or steak taco has around one gram of sat fat. If roughly 220 calories aren’t enough for you, try the **Mexico City Chicken or Steak Basket**. You’ll get two tacos (for a lower price than ordering them separately) and unlimited trips to the Fresh Salsa Bar. Skip the chips and you cut the calories down to 420.

■ **Shrimp Tacos.** “Baja style” means cabbage, avocado, Baja sauce, and (not much) cheese. That gives a single **Baja Style Shrimp Taco** only 320 calories, two grams of sat fat, and 400 mg of sodium. A **Baja Style Shrimp Taco Basket** (two tacos plus chips) has only 630 calories if you skip the chips. Visit the Fresh Salsa Bar instead.

Photo: Martin LePire.



**Quesa-dilly.** Most chains’ cheese quesadillas have 850 to 1,150 calories, 25 to 35 grams of sat fat, and 1,400 to 2,200 mg of sodium (without chips or garnish). That’s three Quarter Pounders.

## La Salsa

Better Bite entrees and platters have no more than 5 grams of saturated fat (or 3 grams of sat fat for a single taco). If you eat the chips that come with most dishes, add the numbers from “Chips” in the Side Orders section. Within each section, items are ranked from least to most sat fat, then calories.

Tacos	Calories	Total Fat (grams)	Sat Fat (grams)	Fiber (grams)	Sodium (mg)
✓ Mexico City <sup>1</sup>	220	4	1	3	280
✓ Baja Style Shrimp	320	19	2	3	400
Taco La Salsa or Sonora Mahi Mahi <sup>2</sup>	250	8	4	2	450
Baja Mahi Mahi	370	23	5	2	470
Vegetarian	280	10	6	4	420

## Burritos

Sonora Mahi Mahi	540	21	8	2	1,550
Bean and Cheese or Original Gourmet <sup>2</sup>	670	24	10	7	1,550
Baja Mahi Mahi	840	54	12	3	1,550
Los Cabos Shrimp or California <sup>2</sup>	780	33	14	6	1,910
Three Pepper Fajita or Grande <sup>2</sup>	810	35	15	6	2,130
El Champion <sup>1</sup>	1,480	55	22	15	3,520

## Salads (numbers include dressing)

Caesar or Chile-Lime Salad <sup>2</sup>	700	47	10	6	1,530
Taco Salad <sup>1</sup>	990	43	15	12	1,820

## Nachos (with guacamole and sour cream) & Quesadillas

Nachos <sup>1</sup>	1,540	81	29	12	2,330
Classic or Grande Quesadilla <sup>2</sup>	1,030	59	31	5	2,090

## Side Orders

Rice	130	3	1	1	530
Black or Pinto Beans <sup>2</sup>	230	2	1	12	570
Chips (served with burritos, fajita platter, baskets, quesadillas, and taco salad)	200	10	2	1	180
Chips (served with platters)	350	17	3	2	320
Guacamole, Salsa, and Chips	970	55	10	13	1,600

## Taco Baskets (two tacos plus chips)

✓ Mexico City <sup>1</sup>	620	19	4	6	740
✓ Baja Style Shrimp	830	48	5	7	980
Sonora Mahi Mahi	600	27	9	2	1,470
Tacos La Salsa or Vegetarian <sup>2</sup>	750	28	11	7	940
Baja Mahi Mahi	950	56	11	6	1,120

## Platters (numbers include beans, rice, and chips)

Two Soft Tacos <sup>1</sup>	1,120	38	12	14	1,770
Three Pepper Fajita <sup>1</sup>	1,090	42	16	14	2,260
Chicken or Steak Enchiladas (2) <sup>2</sup>	1,110	45	16	13	2,230
Burrito Ranchero <sup>1</sup>	1,340	52	16	17	3,410
Cheese Enchiladas (2)	1,250	64	31	12	2,150
Taquitos (2) & Quesadilla <sup>1</sup>	2,040	106	40	20	3,620

✓ Better Bite. <sup>1</sup>Average of all varieties. <sup>2</sup>Average of the items listed.

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