

6 unhealthy vegetable dishes to avoid at hawker centres

WHAT TO EAT

By Li Yuling

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Photo credit: Li Yuling

If you're trying to eat healthy, loading up on [vegetables](#) might seem like the right thing to do. Unfortunately, that's not always so. Just one serving of a popular local veggie-based dish could pack nearly as much fat and calories as [two cheeseburgers](#)! Enough spoilers for now — read on to find out which veggie items dieters should avoid at the hawker centre.

1. Sambal Kangkong

Per 300g serving: 396 calories, 30.9g fat (13.2g saturated), and 2,184mg sodium.

What gives the kangkong its kick also makes it a major fat bomb. Yes, I'm talking about that spicy and savoury sambal chilli sauce. It certainly doesn't help that the leaves and stalks soak up a lot of oil from the sauce. Shockingly, sambal kangkong actually has about double the fat found in sambal sotong! To be specific, a 300g serving of sambal sotong has 15.6g of fat.

A healthier vegetable dish would be stir-fried cabbage, says Jaclyn Reutens, dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants (www.aptima-nsc.com). "If sambal kangkong is the only vegetable dish on the menu, I would have no more than three spoons of it."

Her advice: Let the veggies sit on some of your rice so that the grains can soak up some excess oil. Just don't eat the greasy rice afterwards!



Photo credit: Li Yuling

2. Vegetable Kurma

Per 441g serving: 542 calories, 31.8g fat (25.1 saturated), and 631mg sodium.

A common go-to choice at Indian stalls, vegetable kurma shockingly has more fat than two cheeseburgers, and almost the same number of calories! One cheeseburger from McDonald's has 297.54 calories and 12g of fat.

Coconut milk accounts for much of the saturated fat in vegetable kurma — something you want to eat in moderation if you're concerned about your heart health. "Try to stop at half a bowl and pair it with a roti (not prata) instead of naan. Roti is comparatively lower in calories," says Reutens.



Photo credit: Li Yuling

3. Popiah

Per 140g serving (one roll): 188 calories, 11.2g fat (3.6g saturated), and 676mg sodium.

Small but dangerous: A [popiah](#) couldn't possibly cost you more calories than a scoop of vanilla ice cream, could it? Unfortunately, it does. (A 100g scoop of ice cream has about 113 calories.)

Popiah is high in fat because the turnip has been simmering in oil for a long time, and the sweet black sauce tacks on more calories. Some stalls also add crispy bits of fried dough, garlic or lard for extra crunch, which makes the popiah even more fatty.

Stick to one roll, but if you're looking for a better snack in the hawker centre, go for a vegetable *pau* (bun), suggests Reutens. "One vegetable *pau* contains 150calories and half the amount of fat."



Photo credit: Julia Khoo

4. Vegetable Murtabak

Per 332g serving: 621 calories, 33.5g fat (14.4g saturated), and 1,205mg sodium.

Sorry guys, a [murtabak](#) is a murtabak — stuffing it with veggies won't make it much healthier. The dough acts like a sponge and retains grease. It's yummy, but not good for the tummy.

“Not all vegetable dishes are created healthy, and vegetable murtabak is clearly one that is misleading to consumers,” says Reuters. “I would eat only half of it and order some dhal for protein and fibre.”



Photo credit: Li Yuling

5. Vegetable Samosa

Per 75g serving (one piece): 206 calories, 11.4g fat (5.3g saturated), and 311mg sodium.

No... not the [samosa](#) too! It may be less damaging to the waistline than the curry puff, but not that much better. "You know you won't stop at one," says Reutens. "And one tiny piece is equivalent to almost three slices of bread. Don't order it at all unless you're about to go for a 10km run."



Photo credit: Li Yuling

6. Rojak

Per 315g serving: 518 calories, 21.5g fat (6.1g saturated), and 914mg sodium.

Time to face the truth: [Rojak](#) isn't healthy at all. Ranking among the worst salads you could possibly have, rojak has as much fat and calories as two chocolate-coated doughnuts. Sure, rojak offers some fibre, but you're better off eating fresh pineapple on its own.

Can't shake the rojak craving? Share it with friends. "Most of the calories come from the *you tiao* (fried dough fritter) and sweet sauce," says Reutens. "Eat less of the *you tiao* or just ask the hawker to omit it. One serving of *you tiao* has 285 calories!" You could request for less sauce too, and avoid mopping up every last drop of it.

Nutrition data source: Health Promotion Board of Singapore

All values are rounded to the nearest whole number, except for fat, which is rounded to one decimal place.

About Yuling

In another life Yuling was the editor of health and fitness magazine Shape Singapore. She didn't subsist on salads and juices, but she did learn a thing or two about eating well. (In 10 words: Know your food; don't deprive yourself; make the calories count.) When Yuling's not writing, she's travelling to sample new cuisines, experimenting with recipes, surfing HungryGoWhere for hot new tables, and finding fun ways to work it all off.