



MONEYGEEK ANALYSIS:

America’s Favorite Meal Just Got a Major Price Hike

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By [Rachel Newcomb](#)

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Brian Walkup, Ph.D.



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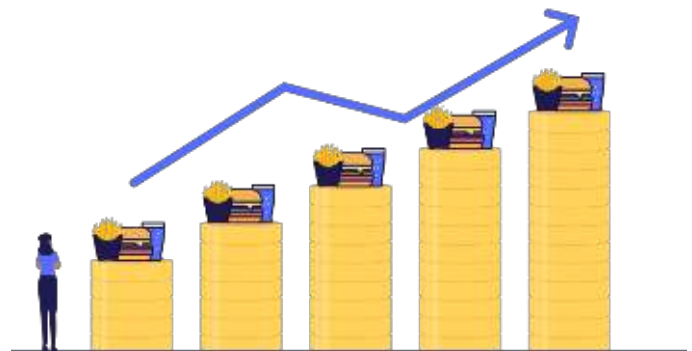
Jill Fopiano

Inflation is coming, and it’s going after the quintessential American meal: a burger, fries and soda. The cost of a burger has gone up dramatically in the past year, meaning that America’s favorite meal may take a toll on our wallets, as well as our waistlines.

MoneyGeek analyzed menu prices for a burger, french fries and soda across 145 major and local chains in the 50 largest cities in America. We found that from 2021 to 2022, prices have risen 9%, on average. But in some cities and franchises, you’ll be paying a whole lot more.

Key Takeaways

MoneyGeek's study found that America's favorite meal has gotten more expensive everywhere. However, our analysis found that price increases were worse in certain cities — and at certain restaurants.





The cost of a burger, fries and soda went up 9% from 2021 to 2022.



Burger King had the largest price increase of any fast food chain, rising 21% across 39 major cities.



San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York were the most expensive cities for a burger, fries and soda, where it costs consumers over \$14 for a meal across major chains.

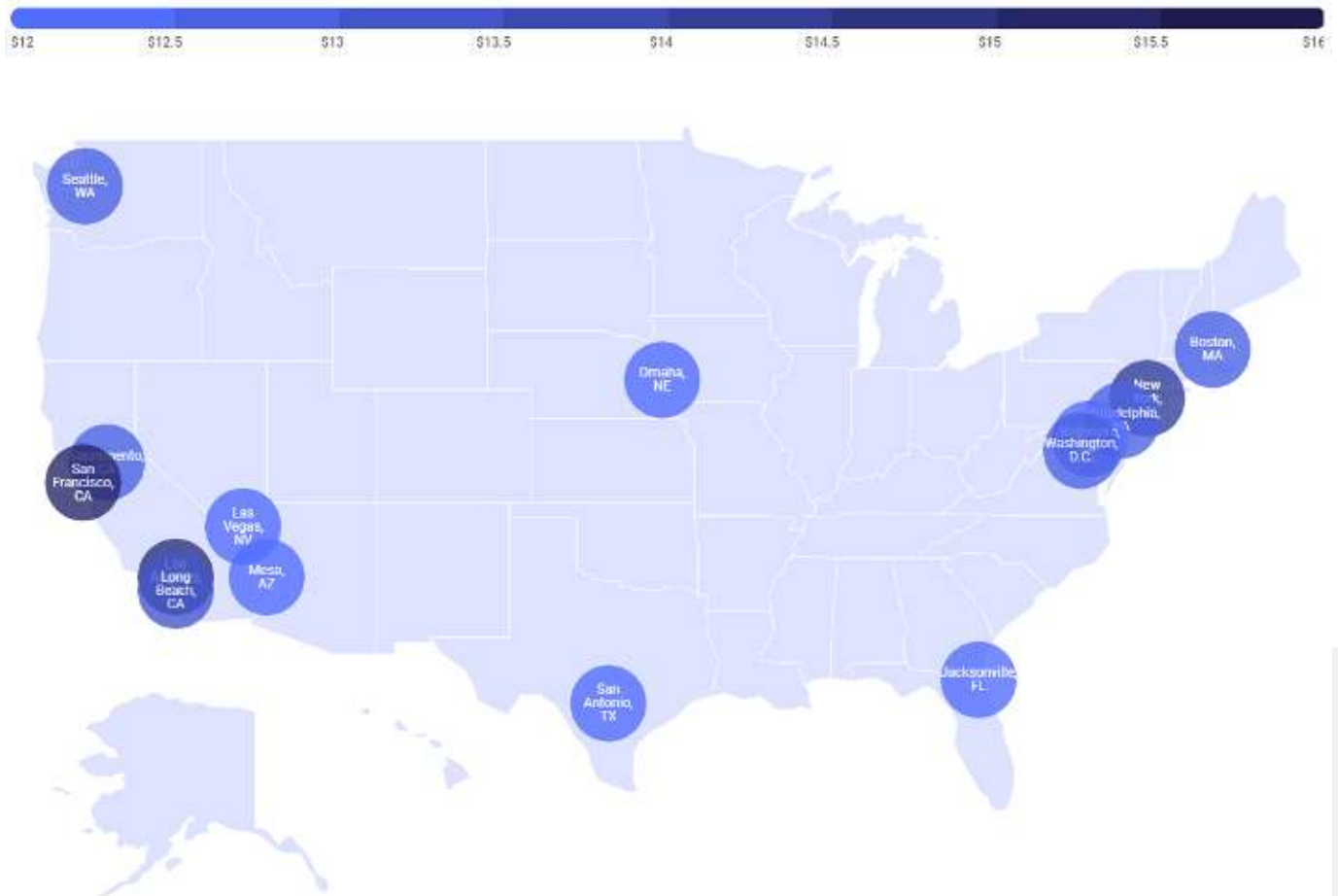


Five Guys is the most expensive burger chain, with customers paying around \$20 for a burger, fries and soda, up \$2.37 from 2021.



The least expensive burger, fries and soda meal was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at \$6.55

Top 15 Most Expensive Cities for a Burger, Fries & Soda



Source: Allmenus.com, Grubhub.com



San Francisco (Not New York) Is the Most Expensive City for Fast Food

Along with high-priced real estate, the West Coast also boasts the highest costs for America's favorite meal.

MoneyGeek's analysis found that San Francisco was the most expensive place to get a burger, fries and soda, with the average meal cost at major chains topping off at \$15.30. California cities occupied four of the top ten spots, with Los Angeles not far behind San Francisco at \$14.59.



In New York, which came in at number three, you'll pay \$14.22 for a meal, on average. With the exception of Mesa, Arizona, the top ten spots were all occupied East and West Coast cities.

For the most affordable burger on the list, head to Tulsa, Oklahoma: at number 50 in our study, we found that you can still get a full burger, fries and soda meal there for \$6.55.

MOST EXPENSIVE CITIES FOR A BURGER, FRIES & SODA

City	Average Meal Price
1. San Francisco	\$15.30
2. Los Angeles	\$14.59
3. New York	\$14.22
4. Long Beach	\$13.08
5. Washington	\$12.94
6. Philadelphia	\$12.89



7. Boston	\$12.69
8. Sacramento	\$12.67
9. Seattle	\$12.58
10. Mesa	\$12.46

The Chain With the Biggest Price Increases? Hint: It's a Whopper

MoneyGeek didn't just analyze prices by cities in our analysis — we also looked into price increases at specific fast-food restaurants.

To calculate those price increases, MoneyGeek used prices from allmenus.com and Grubhub.com for 2022, along with data archived by the Wayback Machine for 2021 prices.

While not quite as high as the costs in the big coastal cities, the price of burgers rose everywhere. A burger, fries and soda at McDonald's — [which sells more burgers than any other chain](#) — will cost you around \$6.19, a price increase of 11.5% from 2021 to 2022. On the pricier side, Five Guys charges, on average, \$19.95 for the same meal, up 13.5% from 2021.

Other restaurants experienced even more significant increases. For instance, the price of a burger, fries and soda went up 18.9% at Wendy's. But prices at Burger King soared the highest at a whopping 21% increase, an average cost difference that climbed from \$6.76 in 2021 to \$8.18 this year.

AVERAGE MEAL PRICE BY CHAIN

Chain Name	Average Price of a Meal in 2022	Average Price in 2021	Percentage Increase
1. Five Guys	\$19.95	\$17.59	13.5%
2. Wendy's	\$10.25	\$8.61	18.9%
3. Jack in the Box	\$10.20	\$8.82	15.6%
4. Burger King	\$8.18	\$6.76	21.0%
5. McDonald's	\$6.19	\$5.57	11.3%



How to Save Money on Meals Amid Rising Food Inflation

It's not surprising that the cost of a hamburger is related to the overall inflationary environment. Inflation takes place when a steady rise in commodity prices is unmatched by a currency's purchasing power: in other words, your money buys less than it could a year ago.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the [year-on-year increase in inflation](#) as of June 2022 was the most extreme increase since 1981. Continued fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from disruptions to the supply chain to the effects of the stimulus package, are a few reasons inflation remains so high.

Experts say that inflation prices — and subsequently, hamburger prices in 2022 — are unlikely to go down any time soon. So how can conscious consumers cope with these rising costs? One tip is to look for restaurants in your area offering specials, often on slower weeknights.

“If you have kids,” says Dr. Brian Walkup, Associate Professor of Finance at the Crummer School of Business at Rollins College, “be aware of what days your favorite restaurants have Kids Eat Free promotions.”

Another idea is to skip the soda, which can cost up to \$3 per person — order water instead, which is better for your health and your final bill. Choosing something off the kids' menu, especially if you have a light appetite, can also save you money.

Finally, consider preparing more meals at home. The cost of a hamburger cooked at home is much lower than one purchased from a restaurant. In general, cooking at home can be part of an overall strategy to [save money and eat well](#). While inflation affects supermarkets as well, Jill Fopiano, President and CEO at O'Brien Wealth Partners, says that grocery stores “require less labor per customer than do restaurants, and they should not see as much price pressure.”

Strategies such as buying in bulk at wholesale stores like Costco and Sam's Club, meal planning and searching for sales can help consumers [create an affordable diet](#) that gives them a little extra money left over at the end of the week. Finding ways to save in other areas will also make the cost of a restaurant dinner with a burger, fries and soda go down a little easier.



Expert Insights

MoneyGeek sat down with industry leaders and academic experts to learn more about what's causing the inflation squeeze at restaurants and some tips about what you can do to fight it.

1. Will we continue to see rising food costs at restaurants or for food more generally?
2. What can people do to save money while still enjoying a night out at a restaurant?
3. What causes inflation in our food prices, and why does the government raise interest rates to try to bring inflation down?
4. Which groups in our society are hurting most from inflation?



Brian Walkup, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Finance, Crummer Graduate School of Business at Rollins College

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Jill Fopiano

President and CEO of O'Brien Wealth Partners

[READ ANSWERS](#)



Dr. Edouard Wemy

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Methodology

MoneyGeek analyzed menu prices for a burger, fries and soda across major chains in the 50 largest cities in America by population size. We utilized allmenus.com and GrubHub.com to source 2022 prices — alongwith the Wayback Machine to source 2021 prices for those same menu items — to calculate price differences.

We sourced 10 different meal prices for each city, analyzing 145 major cities and local chains and burger restaurants to create average prices for our rankings. Note: El Paso, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; Memphis, Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; Wichita, Kansas; and Tulsa, Oklahoma, had less than 10 entries for meal prices.

If you have any questions about our findings or methodology, please reach out to Melody Kasulis via email at melody@moneygeek.com



About the Author



Rachel Newcomb is an award-winning writer, storyteller and professor of anthropology at Rollins College. She has over two decades of experience conducting research internationally and domestically and has published books about women's rights, migration and globalization in Morocco.

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- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[Consumer Price Index Summary.](#)" Accessed September 25, 2022.