



Food & drink
Shortcuts

Can you ever have 'healthy' fried chicken?

A new community-run shop will open later this year offering a wholesome version of the fast-food classic. But will schoolkids go for a non-greasy takeaway?



Felicity Cloake

Monday 30 March 2015 17:36 BST



Shares
228

Comments
266



Fried chicken outlets are ubiquitous, but their fare needn't be so unhealthy. Photograph: Mediablitzimages/Alamy

London has more than 8,000 fried chicken shops. [According to the market researchers Mintel](#), young people are the heaviest (I use the term advisedly) users of these restaurants in the UK. One in three 11-year-olds in the capital is overweight.

The surprise is not that someone is finally trying to launch a healthier alternative, but that it has taken so long - though pop-up healthy fast food vans have been trialled in London before, a new outlet, [Chicken Town](#), is the first bricks-and-mortar shop to take on the challenge.

It will open in Tottenham, north London, in September, ready for the new school year. According to the not-for-profit community organisation behind the project, Create, there are 30 fast-food outlets within a mile of the site, so it will have to work hard for its business. Importantly, prices will be on a par with competitors, with a junior special priced at just £2, subsidised by the more grown-up trade the team hope to attract in the evenings.

What is on offer, however, is very different: the chicken, for example, will be free-range, and steamed before frying to cut down its time in the oil, meaning it will have only 30% of the fat and calories of the ordinary high-street variety.



📷 Fried chicken can be made less fattening by steaming before frying.
Photograph: Alamy

Interestingly, product developer William Leigh, who founded [upmarket chicken joint Wishbone](#) before selling it on to the Meatailer group last year, tells me that this is a fairly common cooking method. Spicy buffalo wings are traditionally pre-steamed to speed up delivery times at busy bars, while Korean-American chef [David Chang](#) of the achingly hip Momofuku empire argues that the process amplifies the natural flavour of his famous fried chicken (not something, perhaps, that might be desirable at your average chicken cottage).

Back in Tottenham, it is not just the meat that will be healthier. The fries will be made from sweet potatoes, which contain more fibre and vitamins - and fewer calories - than the ordinary white variety, and the menu, which is being developed by an executive chef with Michelin-starred experience, will also feature alternative sides such as greens, coleslaw and roasted corn.

Whether they will hold the same attraction for the borough's kids remains to be seen. Leigh is sceptical: "Fried chicken is an indulgent treat - and the treat aspect is key. I'd probably just eat something else rather than something that just leaves you craving the real thing."

Instead, he thinks the problem is a far deeper and more complex one, with its roots in education and the cost of food. Still, if you, like me, think it can't hurt to try, you might be interested to know that Chicken Town is currently seeking donations via [Kickstarter](#) to meet its opening costs.