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# columns

This month from our **Whining & Dining** column:

## Burger Heaven

By Dan Bortolotti

**I love my kids**, and I love food. Unfortunately, I don't always love them together.

My wife and I have been taking our son and daughter to restaurants since they were very little, including several dozen burger joints in the GTA. It used to be a bonus to get their meals in a box emblazoned with mazes, word finds and Disney characters. But our kids are older now — Erick is almost nine, and Jaimie is pushing 12 — and there does come a time when a dad and his kids long to enjoy a decent hamburger that isn't accompanied by a choking hazard not suitable for children under three. South St. Burger Co., a new purveyor of patties that just opened in North York, seemed like a promising alternative. We set out to give it a try.

South St. Burger Co. is owned and operated by the folks at New York Fries, which I sheepishly admit I didn't know was a Canadian company — it was founded by two brothers in Brantford, Ontario. Hoping to move out of the sideshow of side orders and onto the main stage of fast food, they opened their first burger restaurant in the Steeles and Dufferin area last August, and the company is planning to expand soon. (For now, their website has a mischievous store locator that prompts you to type in your postal code and then confesses that, alas, there's only one.)

When we arrived with rumbling tummies, it didn't take long to see that South St. Burger Co. is a big step up from your typical burger chain. The décor is sleek and devoid of plastic McFurniture, with stainless steel fixtures, wood veneer tables, semi-circular booths and a long padded bench that stretches along the west window. Off to the side of the order counter, there's even a barstyle TV tuned to the sports channel — although on the day we visited, it happened to be showing a frightfully dull game of bowling.

When you step up to place your order, the first thing you notice is that there are no kids' meals, no super-size combos, no nuggets, and no low-carb bunless options. Your choices are basic: hamburger (\$4.50), veggie burger (\$4.50) or grilled chicken (\$5.50), with cheese or bacon a buck extra. Side orders are, not surprisingly, New York Fries, onion rings or a salad (all \$2.75), or you can get them to slather fries in gravy and cheese curds and enjoy real poutine (\$3.85, angioplasty not included). Everything is prepared fresh — burgers, potatoes and onions are never frozen.

To this point, South St. Burger Co. may look like a glorified Harvey's. But when you shuffle to the left and start fixing your burger, you'll find a decidedly different array of condiments, including Dijon horseradish, mango chutney, zesty ketchup and

fancy red onions. My kids, of course, asked for the regular ketchup — and lots of it. (Sometimes I think hamburgers and hot dogs are simply utensils for shoving as much ketchup as possible into their mouths.) In any case, the staff fixed our burgers just the way we like 'em and placed them on funky round trays, like the ones a cocktail waitress might carry.

Our meal — three burgers, a grilled chicken, two orders of fries and drinks — was more than \$37, which is a good \$15 more than we would have spent for the same stuff at Wendy's or Harvey's. But the food was far superior. The burgers are first-rate, bigger and tastier than the drive-thru variety, and they're served on a large toasted kaiser. My tomato and onion toppings were all fresh and flavourful, too. The milkshake, Erick reports, was thick and rich, and made with real ice cream, not that tasteless stuff they use to make soft-serve cones.

If you're looking to get away from the kiddie atmosphere, but still want a fast, family-friendly meal, South St. Burger Co. is well worth the extra money. One warning, though: only big kids, or seriously hungry ones, will be able to finish one of these burgers. We even ended up with uneaten ketchup.

**South St. Burger Co.**  
2215 Steeles Avenue West  
[www.southstburger.com](http://www.southstburger.com)

**Tidbits**  
(out of 6 stars)

**Price:** ★★☆☆  
**Fun Factor:** ★★☆☆  
**Taste:** ★★☆☆

*Dan Bortolotti is a former managing editor of Today's Parent and a connoisseur of fine condiments. He lives in Aurora and only ventures into the 416 area code when absolutely necessary.*

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