**What is Falafel?**

The **word “falafel”** may descend from the Arabic word **falāfil**, a plural of the word **filfil**, meaning **“long pepper.”**

It is a popular Middle Eastern “fast food” made of a mixture of chickpeas (or fava beans), fresh herbs, and spices that are formed into a small patties or balls which are deep-fried or baked.  It is commonly served in a [pita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pita), which acts as a pocket, or wrapped in a [flatbread](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flatbread) known as [taboon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboon_bread); "falafel" also frequently refers to a wrapped sandwich that is prepared in this way. The falafel balls are topped with salads, [pickled vegetables](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pickling), [hot sauce](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hot_sauce), and drizzled with [tahini-based sauces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahini). Falafel balls may also be eaten alone as a snack or served as part of a [meze](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meze) tray (known as an assortment of appetizers).

Falafel is made from [fava beans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vicia_faba) or [chickpeas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chickpea), or a combination. Chickpeas are common in most Middle Eastern countries. The dish is usually made with chickpeas in [Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria), [Lebanon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon), [Jordan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan), [Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel) and [Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Palestine). This version is the most popular in the West. The Egyptian variety uses only fava beans.

It’s thought that falafel originated in Egypt as Coptic Christians looked for a hearty replacement for meat during long seasons of fasting or lent.  It has also become a popular vegetarian food in Egypt and throughout the Middle East.

Falafel continues to be the people’s daily grub in Egypt and you can find it from street vendors in almost every neighborhood.  It’s often served in sandwich form with a generous drizzle of [tahini](https://www.themediterraneandish.com/tahini-sauce-recipe-how-to-make-tahini/) and loads of [Mediterranean salad,](https://www.themediterraneandish.com/3-ingredient-mediterranean-salad/) along with slices of roasted or [fried eggplant.](https://www.themediterraneandish.com/fried-eggplant-recipe-with-green-peppers-tomato/)

**Fun Facts…**

1. Debates over the history of falafel have sometimes devolved into political discussions about the relationship between Arabs and Israelis. In modern times, falafel has been considered a **national dish of Egypt, Palestine, and Israel**. Many Palestinians resent what they see as the appropriation of their dish by Israelis. Additionally, the Lebanese Industrialists’ Association has raised assertions of copyright infringement against Israel concerning falafel.
2. Falafel became so popular that McDonald’s for a time served a **“McFalafel”** in its breakfast menu all over Egypt.
3. Falafel is **high in many micronutrients** and a **good source of fiber and protein**. As such, it may help curb your appetite, support healthy blood sugar, and lower your risk of chronic disease. Yet, it’s typically deep-fried in oil, which raises its fat and calorie content.
4. A **100-gram** (3.5-ounce) **serving** of 6 small patties of falafel contains **333 calories**.
5. The **largest falafel weighs 101.5 kg** (223 lb 12.3 oz), and was achieved by Hilton Dead Sea Resort & Spa (Jordan) in the Dead Sea, Jordan, on 31 May 2019.
6. The **largest serving of falafel was 5,173 kg** (11,404 lb 8 oz) and was achieved by Chef Ramzi Choueiri and the students of Al-Kafaat University (all Lebanon) in Beirut, Lebanon, on 9 May 2010. The falafel was made by around 300 student chefs under the direction of Chef Ramzi, and served on the new largest ceramic plate, which measured 7.17 m in diameter and was created by local architect, Joe Kabalan.

