

Vegan Rella Natural Cheese Alternative - Cheddar Style (Vegan, Soy-Free)

By VeggieGirl - Vegan 'cheese' – hearing those two words together are often enough to send both non-vegans AND vegans running away in the other direction. In the past, vegan 'cheeses' have been notoriously known for their chalky taste, waxy texture, unusual odor, and inability to melt to any degree (it's no wonder why most vegan 'cheese' products usually remain tucked-away and untouched on supermarket shelves). I remember sampling some vegan 'cheese' a few years ago (before my vegan days) and I vowed to never repeat that horrific experience ever again; especially since I didn't really miss cheese that much once I actually went vegan (aside from pizza and pasta dishes, I rarely consumed 'cheesy' meals). However, after seeing the results and photographs of such wonderful meals that include vegan 'cheeses' on several blogs, I have to admit that I have become quite curious as to how good those 'cheese-wannabe' products really are – have I been missing out? It was time to forget my past horrific experience with the stuff, and find out.

Flipping through my copy of The Everyday Vegan, I stumbled upon a great recipe for Grilled Soy Cheese Sandwiches – as someone who has never made a grilled cheese sandwich before (I didn't eat them even when I did consume dairy products), I appreciated the fact that Dreena included this simple (yet extremely helpful!) recipe in her fantastic cookbook (this way, I wouldn't have to worry about overcooking the sandwiches, since the recipe provides proper cook-times, how to layer the toppings in the sandwich, etcetera). Dreena recommended that I try the Vegan Rella® brand of 'cheese,' which I just happened to find at that health food store I only go to a couple times per month (since it's an hour away from my house; Whole Foods is just down the street from me, so I prefer shopping there). Scanning the front and back labels on the package, it boldly states that there are no preservatives, no dairy, no lactose, no hydrogenated oils or trans-fats, no soy (it's made from brown rice flour), and that you can use it like "real cheese" – sounds too good to be true, but I decided to give Vegan Rella® a fair chance.

At this point, I was all set with my ingredients to make grilled 'cheese' sandwiches, for this week's Family Dinner Night. I must admit, this was a pretty brave move on my part, serving vegan 'cheese' to my omnivore parents (and myself for that matter, since I was skeptical after that one bad experience I had a few years ago); however, as I've mentioned several times before, they are such good sports and didn't hesitate to try it.

So, the meal for Family Dinner Night featured grilled-'cheese'-and-red-onion sandwiches with a side of steamed broccoli, carrots, spinach, zucchini, and squash (I ate the majority of the vegetables on my plate before taking the picture, haha). Words simply cannot describe just how incredible Vegan Rella® is at melting! Do any of you remember those Kraft® Singles commercials, like this one, where the little girl pulls apart her sandwich, creating a string of ooey-goey cheese? My sandwich did that!! Honestly, I still can't fathom the fact that Vegan Rella® is able to melt so well. On the package, as mentioned before, it clearly states, 'Use Like Cheese' – and I can attest that you most certainly can use this product just like real cheese, and that it tastes fantastic as well (especially when paired with the grilled red onions that I included in the sandwiches).

Now I know what you're all thinking – that's great that Vegan Rella® melts, tastes good, etcetera, etcetera; but what did my omnivore parents think of it? I am beyond thrilled to report that my parents (are you ready?) loved it!! They were both impressed with the remarkable flavor and texture, and although they admitted that it obviously doesn't taste EXACTLY like real cheese, it sure does come close; and my dad even asked me to buy a package of the Follow Your Heart® brand of 'cheese,' in addition to another package of Vegan Rella®, in order to compare the two!! When an omnivore requests having vegan 'cheese' more than once, and more than one brand of it, then it must be good :0)

For the record, one ounce (or 1/8 of a package) of Vegan Rella® is 28 grams and has 50 calories, 2 grams of fat (0 grams of saturated fat), 0 milligrams of cholesterol, 0 grams of protein, 8 grams of carbohydrates, and 0 grams of fiber, and 2% of the RDA for calcium. I'll admit, I'm rather disappointed in the extreme lack of protein, calcium, and other nutrients in this product – however, it is important to note that this is not an 'everyday food,' and should be enjoyed in moderation; and really, when you compare it side-by-side to dairy cheese, Vegan Rella® wins hands-down (unlike Vegan Rella®, dairy cheese typically contains significant amounts of fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; and all dairy contains at least trace amounts of 'naturally occurring' trans-fats, which are bad for your health in every form, "natural" or not). If you are eating a well-balanced diet, then you should not be worried about nutrient deficiencies (meaning, you should be receiving proper nutrition from various WHOLE foods throughout the day, and not have to rely solely on vegan 'cheese' to obtain nutrients). So, Vegan Rella® can simply become a fun component of your meals, served in a variety of different ways (i.e. in any way that you could use real 'cheese' - oh, the possibilities!).

I purchased a package of Vegan Rella® for \$3.69 – I feel that it was worth the price, and I will most certainly keep Vegan Rella® in my fridge not just to satisfy a craving for a grilled ‘cheese’ sandwich or another 'cheese-containing' meal, but to take comfort in knowing that the days of notoriously revolting vegan ‘cheese’ are over (thanks to Vegan Rella®)! And, once again, kudos to Mom and Dad for trying Vegan Rella®; I’m happy that this past week’s dish for Family Dinner Night was yet another delicious, successful meal. Review provided by VeggieGirl! VeggieGirl keeps her own blog full of her vegan cooking, dining out, and new food ventures.