

Nutritional Labeling for Menus

Why and How

Menu labeling is the practice of providing information about calories, fat, sodium or other selected nutrients on menu items at the point of purchase. It is another tool to help reduce the incidence of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases.

For most people, it is relatively easy to understand the nutritional facts about foods purchased at the grocery store, then prepared and consumed at home. The U. S. Food and Drug Administration requires nutritional labeling for most prepared foods, both canned and frozen. Nutrition labeling is voluntary for fish and raw produce, including fruits and vegetables.

However, Americans eat and drink about one-third of their calories away from home. That's why having access to nutritional information when eating away from home, including at the workplace, is so important. Knowing the caloric and nutritional values of foods and beverages helps individuals make healthier, informed choices for themselves and their families.

Today, Americans spend nearly half of their food budget on meals away from home. This drastic increase supports the need to expand menu labeling and provide calories and other nutritional information to consumers at the point of purchase. Research supports the notion that most adults underestimate the number of calories in the food purchased and consumed away from home, leading them to indulge in foods higher in calories.

In one study, 73 percent of the 193 adult participants underestimated the number of calories found in light menu items by an average of 43 calories and underestimated less healthful menu items by an average of 632 calories. The research shows that menu labeling can reduce intentions to purchase high-calorie and high-fat items when consumers are made aware of a discrepancy between perceived and actual calorie/fat content.

Results from a 2008 study showed 63 percent of adults use nutritional labels to select packaged food. Another study found that consumers who read nutritional labels on packaged foods tend to consume healthier diets compared to those who do not.

Providing nutritional information has the added benefit of increasing the likelihood that a cafeteria or restaurant will elect to serve healthier items on the menu. Revamping cafeteria menus to be more healthful benefits not only the health-conscious customer, but also the diner who may have less interest in modifying his diet based on nutritional information being presented on the menu.

Federal Labeling Requirements

In 2013, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration implemented menu labeling regulations with specific rules requiring that calorie information be listed on menus and menu boards in chain restaurants (and similar retail food establishments) and vending machines.

Menu Labeling
The federal regulations apply to restaurants if they are part of a chain of 20 or more locations, doing business under the same name, selling substantially the same menu items and offering restaurant-type foods.

Vending Machines
These rules require operators who own or operate 20 or more vending machines to disclose calorie information for food items sold, subject to certain exemptions.



Nutritional Labeling

How to Implement

Menu labels can be posted in many ways, including on cards in front of items, on the menu board itself, on printed menus, on the hospital's website or employee portal, or on even on printed sheets displayed on the cafeteria door. How nutritional facts are displayed varies by entity, and may be affected by third-party vendor contracts or by the hospital's internal policy.

Customers rarely seek out nutritional information when it is not made available at the point of purchase. So posting selected facts increases awareness of nutritional information and potentially increases education regarding what is and is not healthy. Evidence supports menu labeling being linked to reduced calories purchased or consumed.

Some entities opt to post only calories, while others are more aggressive and elect to post an item's carbohydrates, trans fats or sodium content. Others simplify further by providing symbols to highlight healthier menu items.

To maximize impact, menu labeling should be accompanied by additional patient and employee education.

As required by the FDA, calories must be posted in a clear, prominent manner on menus and menu boards and on signs next to self-service foods and foods on display. For calorie declarations on menus and menu boards, the size of the calorie declaration must be no smaller than the size of the name or price of the menu item, whichever is smaller. In general, calorie declarations must be in the same or similar color used for the name of the menu item. The menu labeling rule also provides specific type size, color and contrast requirements for calorie declarations on signs next to self-service foods and foods on display.

For those vending machines to which federal rules apply, the calories must be posted on a sign (e.g., small placard, sticker, poster, etc.) close to the article of food or selection button, subject to certain exceptions. The vending machine rule contains certain requirements related to size of type, color and contrast of the calorie declarations to ensure visibility at the point of purchase.

For chain restaurants posting only calories on menus and menu boards, a statement that "additional nutrition information is available upon request" must be included, according to the FDA rules. The following written nutrition information is required to be available to consumers upon their request: total calories, calories from fat, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, fiber, sugars and protein.

To help consumers understand the calorie information provided on menus and menu boards within the context of a total daily diet, FDA requires covered restaurants also to include a short statement on menus and menu boards about daily caloric intake, such as: "2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice, but calorie needs vary."

Evidence suggests that menu labeling does not have any bearing on revenue generated. Once implemented, menu labeling can result in *small* reductions in calories purchased. However, menu labeling and posting nutritional information to improve employee and patient health are far from being a magic bullet. Taste, pricing and convenience also will impact consumer decisions and purchasing behavior, which often are in conflict with eating healthy. A few months of exposure to menu labeling, even if on a daily basis, will not necessarily affect consumer decision-making. **To maximize impact, menu labeling should be accompanied by additional patient and employee education.**

WORLD CUISINE		SOUTH OF THE BORDER	
	calories		calories
Vegetarian Shepherd's Pie 4.80 578 🟡🟢		Angus Beef Tacos 3.60 590 🟡	
Oven-baked medley of peas, onions, carrots, corn, celery, & mashed potatoes simmered in wine		Slow-cooked beef simmered in a tomato sauce seasoned with oregano, paprika, cumin, garlic	
Cajun Potato Casserole 4.80 586 🟡🟢		Peruvian Rustic Stew 3.90 523 🟡🟢	
Sauteed Yukon Gold potatoes simmered in cooking sherry and gumbo, with onions, bell peppers, celery and garlic.		Root vegetables cooked in lime juice, mild chiles, onions, chopped cilantro, then marinated in wine vinegar	
o Add a 20 oz fountain drink .40		Combo Add a 20 oz fountain drink .40	

The Kansas Hospital Association and Healthworks have created a series of resources designed to inform and support efforts to promote healthy food and beverage environments in Kansas hospitals. Information for this document came from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The Kansas resources are funded in part by the Kansas Health Foundation. For more information, visit the Healthy Kansas Hospitals website at www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org.