Don't keep us guessing: Campaigners call for more information on fast food menus

The Food Commission is urging the UK government to make fast food chains display nutrition information on menu boards, next to the name and price of the item.

In US cities, New York and Seattle, chains like Starbucks and Subway already comply with regulations which require disclosure of calorie content on menu boards at the point of sale, but no labelling is offered to UK or European customers.

"US restaurant chains should treat their European customers as openly as they do their American customers and provide nutrition details at the point of sale here," said Anna Glayzer for The Food Commission. "At the moment customers have to rely on guess work if they want to make healthier choices."

To test how easy it is to work out which menu items could be considered healthier choices, the Food Commission conducted a survey of 66 nutrition and obesity experts at the European Congress on Obesity in Geneva, and found that none could tell from the menu description which food was likely to have most calories or fat. Asked five simple multiple choice questions, not one of the experts answered all five correctly with most of them getting only one or two answers correct.

On the street, members of the public fared little better. The Food Commission asked 220 people multiple choice questions about the nutritional value of well known menu items from major chain restaurants. Only one person got full marks, whilst 91% of those asked got less than half of the answers right.

"People are eating out more than they used to," said Glayzer. "If companies are genuinely serious about wanting to offer healthy choices, they need to give customers up front information. If they can do it in the States, then there is no reason why they should not do it here."

Embargo - 00.01am Monday 11th August 2008
Notes to editors

Examples of questions from the public survey:

1. Which sub at Subway has the most calories: (note: Subs are on whole wheat bread with lettuce, tomato, pickles, onions, green peppers, olives and cheese)
   a) 6 inch Tuna Salad Sub (402 cal)
   b) 6 inch Steak and Cheese Sub (336 cal)
   c) 6 inch Subway Melt (Turkey, Ham, Bacon and Cheese) (351 cal)
   d) 6 inch Veggie Patty Sub (414 cal)
   Only 4.5% of people surveyed guessed the correct answer, the Veggie Patty Sub

2. Which item at Kentucky Fried Chicken has the most amount of fat?
   a) Large Coleslaw (22.4 grams)
   b) Regular Popcorn Chicken (17.8 grams)
   c) Large Fries (19.4 grams)
   d) Fillet Burger (15.6 grams)
   Just 22% were able to guess the answer, the Large Coleslaw

3. Which meal item at Burger King has the most amount of fat?
   a) Double Whopper with Cheese (57 grams)
   b) Bacon Double Cheeseburger (27 grams)
   c) XL Bacon Double Cheeseburger (51 grams)
   d) Smoked Bacon and Cheddar Angus (41 grams)
   Only 25% of people asked guessed that the Double Whopper with Cheese had the most fat.
For more information contact Anna Glayzer, 020 7837 2250, anna@foodcomm.org.uk

See: http://www.foodcomm.org.uk/latest_08_menus.htm

Pictures: Links below show calorie labelling in Starbucks and in Subway stores, New York City. Images are free for media use, please credit CSPI.

http://www.cspinet.org/menulabeling/images/starbucksfoodtag.jpg

http://www.cspinet.org/menulabeling/images/subwaydoublestacked.jpg

The Food Commission is an independent, voluntary body campaigning for safer, healthier food in the UK.

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