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The Writing on the Wall



Boston Pizza's Boston Cheesesteak sandwich has nearly three times more calories than the chain's NY Striploin Steak sandwich (1,140 vs. 420). At Tim Hortons, a Frosted Cinnamon Roll has almost twice as many calories as a

Chocolate Glazed Donut (470 vs. 260).

In the United States, patrons would have a decent shot at seeing those numbers right on the menu or menu board. Restaurants in New York City, Seattle, California, and elsewhere now give tens of millions of U.S. diners the goods on sometimes-shocking numbers: a 580-calorie venti White Chocolate Mocha at Starbucks, for example, or a 1,360-calorie Baconator Triple at Wendy's.

But this is Canada, and people who eat at Tim Hortons, Kelsey's, Starbucks, cafeterias, movie theatres, and elsewhere are left in the dark. Why?

Because restaurant menus are exempt from the eight-year-old regulations mandating Nutrition Facts for calories and 13 other nutrients on foods sold in grocery and convenience stores (and foods sold to restaurants!).

That's unfair to consumers. Nutrition Facts labels on food packages have helped shoppers put healthier foods into their carts and have quietly spurred companies to trim "bad" nutrients (like sodium and trans fat) and boost "good" ones (like fibre). Restaurant-goers deserve no less.

Some chains provide nutrition information on the Internet or in brochures or posters at the restaurant. But who has the time to go online before going to lunch? And one U.S. study found that only six of 4,311 patrons at four fast-food chains asked for a brochure or saw a poster before ordering.

In the United States, the industry's National Restaurant Association went from being an opponent of dozens of local and state menu labelling laws to being a proponent of a single calories-only national law. It did that to protect its members from a hodgepodge of laws that required different information on menus in different places.

Those local laws were championed by public-health-minded legislators and shored up by health advocates. We need the same

kind of activism in Canada. Bonus: If cities or provinces require menu labelling, the federal government may not have the authority to undo or block those initiatives.

In fact, Canadian governments could one-up the U.S. Congress by including sodium labelling (or warning labels for high-sodium foods) along with calories.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada,

Canadian Public Health Association, Ontario Medical Association, and Dietitians of Canada have each called for some form of menu nutrition labelling, and the U.S. Institute of Medicine—highly respected by Health Canada policy-makers—twice recommended menu labelling. So did Health Canada's own Sodium Working Group.

Since the restaurant industry refuses to provide menu labelling on its own, I hope that thousands of *Nutrition Action* readers and others will help press governments across the country to require calorie and sodium numbers on menus and menu boards. If you'd like to help, visit www.cspinet.ca.



Here's what Starbucks customers in New York—but not Toronto or Vancouver—see.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
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