

Myth vs Reality:

Nutrition Labeling at Fast-Food and Other Chain Restaurants

Myth: Special orders are common, and it would be impossible for a menu to list nutrition information for all possible different food preparation options and combinations.

Reality: Restaurants only would have to provide nutrition information for standard menu items as “offered for sale.”

- Menu labeling does not apply to customized orders or to daily specials (neither are standard menu items).
- If restaurants can provide nutrition information on websites and brochures, they should be able to put those numbers on menus where people can see them and use them when ordering.

Myth: The cost of nutrition labeling would drive chain restaurants out of business.

Reality: Half of large chain restaurants already provide nutrition information on their websites and would not incur any new costs for analyzing their products. The other half also should be able to provide nutrition information.

– For those restaurants that do not already have nutrition information, nutrition analysis software is available for around \$500. The cost of a dietitian to assist with menu analysis or lab analysis is in line with other costs of doing business, such as buying a restaurant-grade oven or dishwasher.

- Many chain restaurants centralize menu development, nutrition analysis, and menu printing; restaurant headquarters incur the costs.
- Menus and menu boards are changed frequently for marketing purposes or to change prices.

Myth: Restaurant nutrition labeling will force mom and pop restaurants out of business.

Reality: Proposed legislation would apply only to restaurants that belong to chains. Small, non-chain business owners would be exempt.

Myth: Everyone knows that fast food is bad for them; they don’t need labels to state the obvious.

Reality: A range of options is available at most restaurants. However, studies show that without nutrition information, it is difficult to compare options and make informed decisions:

- two jelly donuts have fewer calories than a bagel with cream cheese
- a small milkshake has more calories than a Big Mac
- an order of French toast has more calories than the steak and eggs



A small milkshake has more calories than a Big Mac!

Myth: Nutrition labeling on packaged foods in supermarkets has not been effective in helping people to make healthier food choices.

Reality: Three-fourths of adults report using food labels. People who read nutrition labels are more likely to make healthier choices.

- Nutrition information at restaurants has been shown to help people make lower calorie choices.

- The rise in obesity rates began well before Nutrition Facts labels were required on packaged foods. Nutrition Facts labels have only been required on packaged foods since 1994. Obesity rates started to increase in 1980.

- Packaged-food labeling has resulted in reformulation of existing products to improve their nutritional quality and the introduction of new nutritionally-improved (low-fat, low-sodium, etc.) products.

Myth: People already have access to nutrition information at restaurants.

Reality: Half of chain restaurants do not provide any nutrition information to their customers.

- Those that do provide nutrition information, provide it on websites, which are not available when ordering, or on posters or brochures, which few people see.

- Restaurants should place nutrition information with other information people use to order -- next to product descriptions and price.

“The menu board is ...the most important way we communicate with our customers in the store about the products we offer and their price; it is what our customers look at, and it is what stimulates their decision to buy.”

-- Hector Munoz , Burger King Corporation

Pretzels	2.49
Original 370 cals	Cinnamon Sugar 450 cals
Almond 400 cals	Glazin' Raisin® 510 cals
Garlic 350 cals	Sour Cream & Onion 340 cals
Jalapeño 310 cals	Whole Wheat 370 cals
Sesame 410 cals	
Pretzel Stix 370 cals	2.99

To be useful, nutrition information must be available and visible where people are ordering.



Auntie Anne's and Cosi menu boards already list calorie information in New York City.



For more information, contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at 202-777-8358 or nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org.