THE HIDDEN COST OF EATING OUT

Over the last several decades, obesity rates have doubled in adults and tripled in children. And restaurant food deserves some of the blame.

If eating out were a rare event, it wouldn’t matter what restaurants served. In Canada, more than 40 cents out of every food dollar is spent outside the home. And what most people order isn’t exactly spa food.

According to U.S. studies (there are no reliable Canadian figures), when people dine out, they typically eat more. For example, women who eat out more than five times a week consume nearly 300 more calories per day than women who eat out less often. And children consume an average of 770 calories in a restaurant meal—almost double the 440 calories they usually eat at home.

Putting calories on fast-food menu boards would help consumers see the true cost of what they order. According to a national poll, the bill would also require large table-service chain restaurants to list calories, sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat.

There are no easy fixes for obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. But restaurants ought to give their customers a fighting chance.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Centre for Science in the Public Interest

CALORIES

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TRIPLE THICK MILKSHAKE, CHOCOLATE (large) 1,170 3.49

That should come as no surprise. What is surprising is that a Tim Hortons Carrot Whole Wheat Muffin has more calories than a Fireside Roast Beef Sandwich (even with the creamy dressing). And could you tell by looking that a large McDonald’s Triple Thick Milkshake has more calories than two Quarter Pounders with Cheese? Shouldn’t diners be able to take that into account before they decide what to order?

MP Tom Wappel of Scarborough (Ontario) thinks so. If passed, his Bill C-398 would require large chain fast-food restaurants to list calories next to prices on their menu boards. That’s what six out of every 10 Canadians want, according to a recent poll. The bill would also require large table-service chain restaurants to list calories, sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat.

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The Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is the non-profit health-advocacy group that publishes Nutrition Action Healthletter. CSPI mounts educational programs and presses for changes in government and corporate policies.

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YOU CAN HELP
Please urge your MP to support Bill C-398. Check the Blue Pages of your telephone directory (under MP or Parliament), call 1-800-O-CANADA (1-800-622-6232), or visit our Web site (http://cspinet.org/canada) and click on “Fax Your MP.”

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