

Menu Labeling:

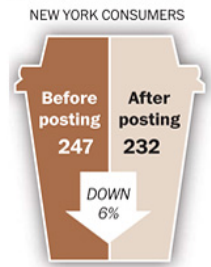
Helping Consumers Make Lower Calorie Choices

"The restaurant is a high-risk food environment...If you eat out frequently you're likely to gain weight over time,"
Gayle Timmerman, PhD,
University of Texas, Austin.¹

A national menu labeling law passed in 2010. It requires all chain restaurants with 20 or more outlets to provide calorie counts on menus and menu boards and full implementation of the law is expected in 2012. Prior to passage of the national law, several states and localities, including New York City, Philadelphia, and Seattle/King County, have implemented menu labeling policies. Though not all studies are able to measure an effect of menu labeling, many show that calorie labeling is helping consumers make lower calorie selections when eating out and is encouraging companies to reformulate products (See [Reformulation Fact Sheet](#)). Three dozen studies show eating out more frequently is associated with obesity, higher body fatness, or higher BMI²; menu labeling can help to reverse that.

A study conducted in Starbucks restaurants found that menu labeling had little effect on beverage calories, but reduced calories in food purchases by 14%. **Together, this is a 6% decrease in calories on average per transaction.** For people buying more calories the effect was bigger, a 26% decrease.^{3,4}

AVERAGE CALORIES PER TRANSACTION

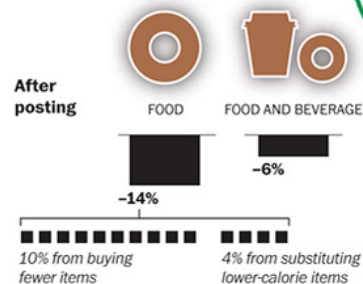


Those averaging more than 250 calories before calorie posting dramatically decreased their calories per transaction.

DOWN 26%

CALORIE REDUCTIONS, BY TRANSACTION TYPE

Almost all caloric reductions came from food purchases, which decreased by 14 calories per transaction or 14 percent. There was no change in beverage choices after postings.



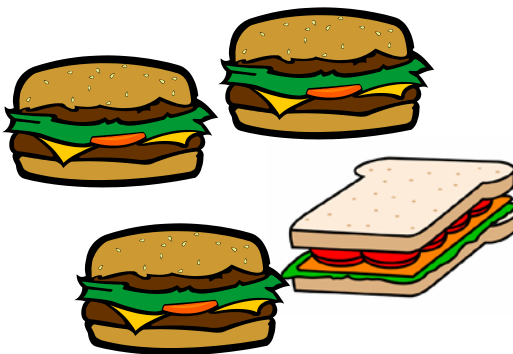
1 in 6 people reported using calorie information and purchased a lower calorie item.

A New York City study found **1 in 6 customers used the calorie information and purchased 106 fewer calories** than customers who did not see or use the calorie information at chain restaurants.⁵

A study of people eating at Subway chains in New York City revealed **1 out of 3 customers (37%) reported that the nutrition information affected their purchases**; those customers purchased meals with 100 fewer calories than those who saw the information and reported it had no effect.⁶



In a New York City online survey, **75% of participants reported that the nutrition information has made an impact on their ordering**; they are ordering lower calorie options, no longer ordering certain menu items, and ordering smaller portion sizes.⁷



1 in 4 people report ordering a healthier option after reading calorie information in restaurants.



Parents of children 3-6 years old were presented with either a McDonald's menu with calorie labeling or one without calorie labeling. They selected meals for themselves and their child. **Parents who received the menu with calorie information ordered an average of 100 fewer calories for their children** than did parents who did not receive the calorie information.⁸

An NPD survey compared consumers ordering off menus with or without calorie counts. **Consumers ordered approximately 120 calories less when ordering off the labeled menu compared with the unlabeled menu.** Consumers also ordered less junk food: French fries, soft drinks, large burgers, shakes, smoothies, and onion rings and more regular sized hamburgers and cheeseburgers, diet soft drinks, salads without dressings, and grilled chicken wraps when ordering from the labeled menu.⁹

120 calories



If people make similar changes in other chain restaurants (and about 25% of calories come from chains), that would mean a **30 calorie per person per day decrease in intake** population-wide.³ Not bad given that there also will be an impact of menu labeling on product reformulation and that the obesity epidemic is explained by a less than **100 calorie per day** imbalance.^{10,11}

References:

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- ¹¹ Hall KD, et al. (2011). "Quantification of the Effect of Energy Imbalance on Bodyweight." *Lancet*. vol. 378, pp. 826-837.

For more information, contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at 202-777-8352 or nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org or visit www.menulabeling.org.