

Read all about it: Calorie counts are everywhere, but do we care?

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.10.15

Word Count **501**



A customer looks at the sandwich board at a Panera store in Brookline, Massachusetts, March 8, 2010. Panera has announced it will post calories on menus nationally. Photo: AP/Charles Krupa

Almost 35 percent of Americans are obese, or seriously overweight. Being obese leads to a higher chance of getting many diseases. To combat this, the government has made laws to help people make healthy food choices.

Fast-food restaurants are required to post calories of the foods they serve. Calories are the unit used to measure the energy in food. When people consume too many calories it can lead to being overweight.

When the law was first set, the government hoped that knowing the number of calories in foods would push people to select healthier options.

It also anticipated that posting calories would encourage restaurants to make better choices available.

A new study shows that they were half right.

A Nudge To Healthier Eating

Showing diners the calorie count of items on a restaurant menu may not lead them to pick healthier foods. But it might prod restaurants into making healthier foods available.

The study was done by researchers from Johns Hopkins University, the University of Pittsburgh and Harvard Medical School. They found that when eateries had to display the calories of foods served, they soon began to offer lower-calorie meals.

So, while posting calories may not improve diners' decision-making, it might limit the damage.

The study suggests the help comes from restaurants' changing what they serve, instead of diners "changing their behavior."

The Pressure Is On For Menu Changes

The study examined restaurants over a period from 2012 to 2014. They found that restaurants that posted calories on menu items averaged 139 fewer calories per item than restaurants that did not.

Restaurants that moved to calorie posting reduced the calorie content of foods they served. They reduced the calories of meals already on their menu by an average of 120 calories. New dishes added to the menus averaged 146 fewer calories than their old standbys.

About 70 percent of fast-food customers said that when they eat out, they almost always get their "usual" order. One study found that two years after calorie information first appeared in Seattle restaurants, just 1 in 4 customers said they used that information when deciding what to eat. About 4 in 10 customers said they did not even notice the new information.

Having to post calories did make the restaurants change, however. Places like Starbucks and McDonald's have reduced calories and fat in some of the foods they serve. They also offer more low-calorie options. For example, the Cheesecake Factory changed some of its dishes to make them healthier. They also added a "SkinnyLicious" menu of offerings that are around 600 calories.

Coming Soon To A Theater Near You

A new law starting in December 2016 will expand calorie posting rules. Not only restaurants, but also other places that sell food such as movie theaters, bowling alleys and ice cream parlors will have to list calories.

Every day, roughly one-third of all American adults and children eat out. So scaling back the calorie content of customer favorites could have a real effect, the study's authors said.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences from the article BEST develops a central idea?
- (A) They found that restaurants that posted calories on menu items averaged 139 fewer calories per item than restaurants that did not.
 - (B) Almost 35 percent of Americans are obese, or seriously overweight.
 - (C) Showing diners the calorie count of items on a restaurant menu may not lead them to pick healthier foods.
 - (D) Not only restaurants, but also other places that sell food such as movie theaters, bowling alleys and ice cream parlors will have to list calories.
- 2 Which answer choice provides an accurate and objective summary of the article?
- (A) Americans should not consider calories when they are ordering from a restaurant menu.
 - (B) The government is hoping to improve the health of Americans by including calorie information on menus.
 - (C) Restaurants that include calorie information on their menus are more likely to attract healthier diners.
 - (D) Calorie information will be put on all menus, including at movie theaters, bowling alleys, and ice cream parlors.
- 3 What is the relationship between the introduction [paragraphs 1-5] and conclusion [paragraphs 14-15] of the article?
- (A) The conclusion explains how the problem mentioned in the introduction began.
 - (B) The conclusion provides further evidence of the problem mentioned in the introduction.
 - (C) The conclusion provides a possible solution to a problem mentioned in the introduction.
 - (D) The conclusion explains how the problem mentioned in the introduction will affect more places that serve food.

4 Read the sentences below.

They found that when eateries had to display the calories of foods served, they soon began to offer lower-calorie meals.

So, while posting calories may not improve diners' decision-making, it might limit the damage.

The study suggests the help comes from restaurants' changing what they serve, instead of diners "changing their behavior."

How does the relationship between these sentences develop the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) They show that some people's health is being improved without their knowledge.
- (B) They explain some restaurants care about the health of their customers more than others do.
- (C) They show that some people who eat at restaurants have no desire to make healthier food choices.
- (D) They show that some restaurants' menus are being forced to change due to government regulations.