

What Every Philadelphian Should Know About Menu Labeling

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1. What is the Menu Labeling Ordinance?

Philadelphia's Menu Labeling Ordinance is a law that requires chain restaurants and certain retail food establishments to post nutrition information for the food and beverages they sell.

The law applies to menu boards (like those in fast food restaurants) as well as menus (like those in restaurants where you sit down).

2. When did the law go into effect?

The law took effect January 1, 2010.

After a grace period, the Department of Public Health began enforcing the law: for menu boards, on February 1; for menus, on April 1.

3. What food establishments are affected?

Food establishments with 15 or more locations in the United States are required to have menu labels. The law affects fast-food chains as well as some sit-down chain restaurants.

4. Why is Philadelphia requiring nutrition on menu boards and menus?

Menu labels that contain nutrition information can help people be more informed about what they are eating and drinking. This information can help them to make healthier choices when they order their food and drinks.

Obesity and being overweight are major risk factors for heart disease, many forms of cancer, and type 2 diabetes. Menu labeling is one way to educate people and help to address this public health crisis.

5. Why should this matter to me?

Studies show that most people don't know the nutrition content of the foods they eat and the beverages they drink. For example, when people are asked to estimate the number of calories contained in their meals and snacks, they usually underestimate the true values.

Studies also show that people will use nutrition information to make more informed choices when it is provided at the point of purchase. Providing basic nutrition information provides consumers with information to help them to make healthier menu choices.

6. What type of nutrition information will I see?

Menu boards, at the point of purchase, are required to post the total number of calories per item and the statement “Additional nutrition information for all menu items available upon request.”

All menus must include the following per food item: total number of calories, grams of saturated fat, grams of trans fat, grams of carbohydrates, milligrams of sodium as well as the statement “A 2,000 calorie daily diet is used as the basis for general nutrition advice; individual calorie needs, however, may vary.”

7. What is a calorie and why does it matter?

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of food. Current dietary guidelines recommend eating and drinking 2,000 calories per day. Many people consume more than they need without getting the proper nutrients for a balanced diet.

To maintain your body weight, the calories you consume in food and beverages must be balanced by the calories you use in normal body functions, daily activities and exercise.

Also remember that the number of servings you consume affects the number of calories you actually eat or drink (your portion amount).

8. What is saturated fat and why does it matter?

Diets high in saturated fat have been linked to coronary heart disease. Current dietary guidelines recommend consuming less than 10% of daily calories as saturated fat.

Animal fats (high-fat cheeses, high-fat cuts of meat, whole-fat milk and cream, butter, ice cream and ice cream products) are a main source of saturated fat.

Certain plant oils also contain saturated fat. These are often added to commercially-prepared foods, such as cookies, cakes, doughnuts, and pies.

9. What are trans fats and why does it matter?

Trans fats are created during food processing when liquid oils are changed into solid fats — a process called hydrogenation. These partially-hydrogenated oils help to keep food fresh longer while on grocery shelves.

The problem is that these partially-hydrogenated oils contain *trans* fats, which can also increase low-density lipoprotein *LDL-cholesterol* and decrease *high-density lipoprotein (HDL)* cholesterol — risk factors for heart disease.

Current dietary guidelines recommend keeping the amount of *trans* fat you consume as low as possible.

10. What are carbohydrates and why does it matter?

Your body uses carbohydrates (carbs) to make glucose. Glucose is the fuel that gives you energy and helps keep your body going. Your body can use glucose right away, or store it in your liver and muscles for when it is needed.

Carbohydrates can be found in fruits; vegetables; breads, cereals, and other grains; milk and milk products; and foods with added sugars (e.g., cakes, cookies, and sugar-sweetened drinks).

Some healthier foods are also higher in carbohydrates, including foods that provide dietary fiber, whole grains, and foods without added sugars.

11. What is sodium and why does it matter?

The salt in our foods and table salt is made up of sodium and chloride. Too much sodium is bad for your health and can increase your blood pressure and risk for a heart disease, heart attack or stroke.

Current dietary guidelines recommend that adults in general should consume no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day.

12. Where can I get more information?

For more information about Philadelphia's Menu Labeling Ordinance, please visit www.phila.gov/health or call (215) 685-5623. For more information about nutrition, please visit www.cdc.gov.

13. How can I report a food establishment that does not have any menu labels?

Remember that not all food establishments in Philadelphia are required to post nutritional information on their menus and menu boards. Only food establishments with 15 or more locations in the United States are required to have menu labels. Most restaurants in Philadelphia are not required to have menu labels.

If you still think a food establishment is not in compliance with Philadelphia's Menu Labeling Ordinance, and you would like to report it, please call (215) 685-7497.