



Youths' Perceptions of Nutritional Information on Menus: A National Mixed Methods Survey

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PURPOSE

- To understand the knowledge and perceptions of menu labeling among a diverse national sample of youth.

BACKGROUND

- In order to combat high obesity rates in the United States, the FDA now requires all chain restaurants to provide calorie and nutritional information on their menus.
- Youth experience some of the worst eating habits, and those of minority and low SES are disproportionately affected (1).
- Past studies have shown that up to 70% of youth do not change their ordering behavior when exposed to menu labeling (2).

HYPOTHESIS

- Youth notice menu labeling and use the information in making dietary decisions.

METHODS

- Mixed methods design including four qualitative probes sent via text message to a national sample of youth ages 14-24 years.
- Youth were recruited via community events and online (Facebook/Instagram) to match national benchmarks based on the 2016 American Community Survey.
- Qualitative responses were coded by two investigators into major categories of responses for each prompt. Discrepancies were reconciled by a third investigator.
- Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

REFERENCES

- Segal LM, Rayburn J, and Martin A. *The State of Obesity. Better Policies for a Healthier America*. 2016.
- Yamamoto B. *Journal of Adolescent Health Vol. 37*. 2005.

QUALITATIVE PROBES

- We want to hear your thoughts about nutrition information on menus. What information do you notice is listed and where?
- Have you found this information useful when deciding what to eat or drink? Tell us more!
- If you could choose what nutrition information was listed, what would you like to see?

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographics of youth who answered at least one question, n=549

| | n (%) | | n (%) |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Age, mean (SD) | 18.6 (3.1) | Education | |
| Gender | | < High School | 206 (38.1) |
| Male | 181 (33.0) | High School Grad | 46 (8.5) |
| Female | 334 (60.8) | Some College or Tech School | 182 (33.6) |
| Other | 34 (6.2) | Assoc. or Tech School Grad | 19 (3.5) |
| Race | | Bachelor's+ | 88 (16.3) |
| White | 420 (76.5) | Parent Education | |
| Black | 65 (11.8) | ≤ High School | 55 (10.2) |
| Asian | 64 (11.7) | Some College or Tech School | 54 (10.0) |
| Other | 20 (3.6) | Assoc or Tech School Grad | 36 (6.7) |
| Hispanic Ethnicity | 68 (12.3) | Bachelor's Degree | 123 (22.9) |
| | | Master's Degree | 169 (31.4) |
| | | PhD | 90 (16.7) |

Table 2: Representative sampling of qualitative responses organized by major themes

| Major Theme | Representative Response |
|---|--|
| The majority of youth find menu labeling to be helpful (n=244) | <i>"Yes. I usually choose what gives me most calories for the least price"-23, Female, Asian</i> <i>"Yes! some things are surprising and it changes my mind about eating it"-20, Female, White</i> <i>"Yeah I think it is useful to know what your putting in your body. It gives you a choice"-18, Female, African American</i> |
| Many youth that do not find menu labeling helpful (n=161) are unconcerned about their diet | <i>"Not really because I'm young so I can eat what I want"-14, Female, White</i> <i>"Not really because I don't really worry about my calorie intake"-15, Male, White</i> <i>"No. I typically still eat what I like"-22, Non-binary, African American</i> |
| Calorie content on menu and food labels is most commonly noticed by youth (n=236) | <i>"I guess aside from product labels, the most common thing I see is some fast food places (and fewer restaurants) list calorie counts for food items"-24, Male, White</i> <i>"Calories some places but that's about it"-22, Female, Asian</i> |
| Youth that do not find menu labeling helpful see calorie content on its own as insufficient | <i>"I'm more concerned about ingredients and sugar, fat and protein content"-23, Female, White</i> <i>"I don't really pay attention to calories because its the amount of sugar you consume that creates the fat"-14, Female, American Indian/Alaskan Native</i> |
| Youth want to see more detailed nutrition information when making eating decisions | 38% wanted to see macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats) 29% wanted to see the sugar content on menu labels 16% wanted to see the ingredients on menu labels |

CONCLUSIONS

- Most youth find menu labeling to be helpful when making eating decisions.
- Youth most commonly notice calorie information on menus.
- Many youth would like menu labeling to include further information, such as macronutrients, sugar content and ingredients.

IMPLICATIONS

- Youth are sensitive to menu labeling and could benefit from nutritional education to make healthy dietary decisions.
- Primary care providers and their care teams can impact dietary decisions of youth by helping them understand and use menu labeling to their advantage.

"I find [menu labeling] useful to a point, but it mostly makes me feel bad because most foods are extremely high in calories and I feel I have to chose something small, like a side salad, to avoid eating a days worth of calories in one sitting"-16, Female, White

"[I do] not really [find menu labeling useful] because when I go out to eat fast food I am not thinking about nutrition at all"-21, Female, Hispanic

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