



MEDICAL SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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

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PURPOSE

- 1. 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

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

QUALITATIVE PROBES

1. We want to hear your thoughts about nutrition information on menus. What information do you notice is listed and where?
2. Have you found this information useful when deciding what to eat or drink? Tell us more!
3. 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)
		Bachelor's+	88 (16.3)
Race			
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)	"Yes. I usually choose what gives me most calories for the least price"-23, Female, Asian "Yes! some things are surprising and it changes my mind about eating it"-20, Female, White "Yeah I think it is useful to know what your putting in your body. It gives you a choice"-18, Female, African American
Many youth that do not find menu labeling helpful (n=161) are unconcerned about their diet	"Not really because I'm young so I can eat what I want"-14, Female, White "Not really because I don't really worry about my calorie intake"-15, Male, White "No. I typically still eat what I like"-22, Non-binary, African American
Calorie content on menu and food labels is most commonly noticed by youth (n=236)	"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 "Calories some places but that's about it"-22, Female, Asian
Youth that do not find menu labeling helpful see calorie content on its own as insufficient	"I'm more concerned about ingredients and sugar, fat and protein content"-23, Female, White "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
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

1. Youth are sensitive to menu labeling and could benefit from nutritional education to make healthy dietary decisions.
2. 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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