

Topic Area: Determinants of Food Choice, Dietary Intake

Abstract Title

The impact of calorie menu labelling in a chain coffee shop

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Abstract

Introduction: The Healthy Menu Choices Act, enacted on January 1, 2017 in Ontario, Canada, requires food establishments with 20 or more locations to display calories on menus. Current research on the impact of calorie labelling suggests an increase in consumer awareness of caloric values, yet limited impact on consumer purchases. The reason for this is unclear, as current literature is limited and lacks qualitative data.

Objectives: To explore the impact of mandatory calorie labelling on Canadian consumer food and beverage choices in a chain coffee shop, and to assess consumer attitudes towards menu labelling.

Methods: This was a small, mixed methods observational study. A questionnaire was created and completed by 50 adults at two chain coffee shop locations. Four focus groups, consisting of 13 participants, were conducted using constructs of the Health Belief Model.

Results: Although 84% of participants believed calorie information should be posted, 52% did not notice. Of the participants that noticed the menu board, 48% indicated calorie counts did not impact their purchases, 24% purchased lower calorie items, and 8% did not purchase an item. 64% of respondents felt calorie count alone did not provide enough information to guide purchases. Four focus group qualitative analysis themes emerged: Ambivalence; Eating Out is a Treat; Variable Level of Nutrition Priority; and, Need for Further Education.

Conclusions: While most participants thought calorie information should be visible on menus, many reported this information did not impact their purchases. The majority believed caloric values alone do not provide enough information to make informed decisions. Studies with larger, more varied populations and validated tools should be conducted to further evaluate the impact of calorie menu labelling.

Significance: The results inform decisions related to calorie menu labelling interventions, and support the development of health promotion tools for general consumer populations in Ontario.