

# Are people more likely to reduce their calorie intake at restaurants when menus include calorie labels?

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For years now, there has been considerable public health concern about the quality of the American diet and the rise in the prevalence of obesity.

In response, the U.S. adopted a nationwide law in 2018 requiring that chain restaurants display calorie counts on their menus and menu boards. To estimate the impact of calorie labeling, LSU Department of Economics Assistant Professor Barton Willage and his co-authors wrote an article titled, "The Impact of Information Disclosure on Consumer Behavior: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment of Calorie Labels on Restaurant Menus," that was published by the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Previous studies have examined the impact of menu label laws almost exclusively in fast-food restaurants and coffee shops. This study provides the first evidence of the effect of menu labels in full-service, sit-down restaurants.

The researchers conducted a randomized controlled field experiment in two full-service restaurants, where the [control group](#) received menus without calorie counts and the treatment group received the same menus but with calorie counts. They estimated that the calorie labels resulted in a 3 percent reduction in calories ordered, with the reduction occurring in appetizers and entrées but not drinks or desserts. Considering how often Americans typically eat at restaurants, the researchers estimate that this calorie reduction would lead to a one-pound weight loss over three years.

"In this study, we show that providing information on [restaurant menus](#) about how many calories are in food changes how people order. Our study suggests that [calorie counts](#) on menus are not a silver bullet to address America's obesity epidemic, but the added information is a useful tool to help improve how people eat," Willage said.

Exposure to calorie information also increased consumers' support for requiring calorie labels by 9.6 percent. These results are informative about the impact of the nationwide menu label requirement and contribute to the literature on the impact of information disclosure on [consumer behavior](#).

**More information:** John Cawley et al, The Impact of Information Disclosure on Consumer Behavior: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment of Calorie Labels on Restaurant Menus, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (2022). [doi.org/10.1002/pam.22219](https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22219)

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