

## Effects of 'Fat Tax' and Calorie Information on Restaurant Food Choices

**Objective:** This research determines the effect of numeric and symbolic calorie menu labeling relative to the effects of a "calorie tax" on caloric intake in a full-service restaurant.

**Study Background:** A 19-week field experiment was carried out in a full-service restaurant. Diners were randomly allocated to: 1) a control menu with no caloric information, 2) a menu with numeric caloric information, or 3) a menu with symbolic, stop-light caloric information. In the last 7 weeks of the study, a "calorie tax" was implemented in which prices were adjusted based on calorie level of menu items.

**Results:** Diners allocated to menus with caloric information reduced the total number of calories ordered, with the greatest reductions occurring from the symbolic menu in larger party sizes. Providing numeric information alone reduced the number of calories ordered by about 4.2% and providing symbolic information further reduced the number of calories ordered by 8.6% relative to the control. The "calorie tax" did not have a statistically significant effect on the total number of calories ordered. The amount consumers would be willing to pay to have the symbolic menu rather than the conventional menu is about \$0.13/person/meal.



Policy Option	Expected Calories Consumed (kcal/person/entrée)	Change from Status Quo
Maintain Status-quo	641.0	
Thin Subsidy	629.5	-11.5
Fat tax	619.0	-22.0
Calorie Label	613.6	-27.4
Calorie + Traffic Light Symbol	585.4	-55.6

**Conclusions:** Menus carrying symbolic caloric information are more effective at reducing caloric intake than numeric information alone. "Fat taxes" did not have a substantive influence on the total number of calories ordered in this full-service restaurant.

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