

NEWS

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How Much Will That Burger Really Cost You?

Los Angeles County Supervisors Zev Yaroslavsky and Michael D. Antonovich Urge Fast Food and Chain Restaurants to Adopt Menu Labeling

LOS ANGELES – Supervisors Zev Yaroslavsky and Michael D. Antonovich today proposed a county ordinance that would implement mandatory menu labeling for fast food and chain restaurants in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The motion will urge 88 cities throughout the county to adopt similar measures in an effort to improve the public's health.

"Currently, consumers have no practical way of knowing the calorie, fat, or salt contents of many common restaurant foods," said Third District Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. "Information is power and, in this case, dietary information is the power to live healthier and longer lives. With this ordinance, Los Angeles County can turn the tide of the obesity and diabetes epidemic that is ravaging our population – especially among teens."

Californians eat out more than ever before. It is estimated that 46% of food dollars are spent away from home today, compared to just 25% in 1955. Most Americans eat out every other day. A 2007 Field Research Poll found that 84% of Californians support requiring fast food and chain restaurants to post nutritional information on menus and menu boards.

"The obesity epidemic has had devastating consequences for the children of Los Angeles County," said Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich who initiated the County's Restaurant Grading system. "This ordinance will give parents the information needed to make informed decisions about the food they feed their children."

The proposed ordinance would require fast food and chain restaurants to post the total number of calories for a menu item on the menu board, at a customer's point of purchase, and provide other nutritional information in the restaurant. This allows a consumer to not only see how much a hamburger or salad would impact their wallet, but how much it would impact their waistline and overall health. A typical meal of a double cheeseburger, medium size soda, and medium size fries could cost a consumer 1,030 calories. It would take an average-size person more than three hours to walk off the calories consumed.

"This motion comes at a time when approximately two-thirds of residents in LA County are overweight or obese and approximately one-fourth of children in the 5th, 7th, and 9th grades are overweight or obese," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "We need to give consumers vital caloric information at the time they choose to make a meal purchase. This will help significantly decrease rates of overweight and obesity."

In a study published by the American Journal of Public Health, researchers studied the ordering habits of fast food customers in New York City. An average meal purchase totaled 827 calories, with one-third

of consumers ordering meals of 1,000 calories or more. When sandwich shop customers were presented with calorie information at the time of ordering however, those consumers ordered an average of 52 fewer calories.

Even a small reduction in the number of calories consumed could make a large impact. A health impact assessment conducted by Los Angeles County Department of Public Health found that if only 10% of consumers ordered meals twice a week that were 100 calories lower than what they would normally eat, it would reduce the nearly 7-million pound average annual weight gain by 40%.

Adults who are obese are at an increased risk for several chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, Type-2 diabetes, and cancer. Children who are obese are more likely to be obese as adults, and are also at increased risk for developing hypertension, high blood cholesterol levels, and Type-2 diabetes during childhood.

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