

Menu Labeling: What It Means For Your Restaurant Business

What is expected under the new menu labeling legislation?

Menu labeling legislation is currently focused on chain restaurants with at least 10-15 locations. Depending on the region of your establishment(s), labeling mandates for standard menu items include total calories, and may also require values for carbohydrates, total fat, saturated and trans fat, sodium, and more.

What if a restaurant does not comply with the labeling laws?

Violations are issued by Health Department inspectors or others authorized to enforce these ordinances. Penalties include fines ranging from \$50-\$1,000 per infraction.

How can restaurants benefit from menu labeling?

Menu labeling allows for **more informed choices** and clear-cut expectations for each meal. Distinguish yourself from competitors by catering to this **growing demand for nutritional and dietary information**. You will impress your customers by empowering them to lead a healthier life. In addition, adding more choices reduced in calories, fat, and sodium will attract a wider clientele.

Is there an advantage to voluntarily posting nutritional information on menus?

Yes. Research indicates that staying abreast of current trends positively correlates with a restaurant's success. According to the National Restaurant Association (NRA), consumers in 2009 are visiting more quick-service establishments for value in dining out. They also crave information on fresh, healthy, and allergy-conscious meals for the whole family. It is advantageous to consider these trends when marketing your establishment, as you will then be **steps ahead of your competitors** who have not adopted menu labeling. Demonstrating commitment and concern for your patrons' health will help build a **loyal customer base**, one trusting of you to consistently provide them with fresh, healthy, and tasty meals.

Should restaurants consider providing nutrition information on their web sites?

Absolutely. An NRA survey indicated that last year, 27% of adults searched online for a restaurant's nutritional information (a **13% growth** over the previous year). Making this information readily available on your website provides added value that will attract customers both new and loyal, at home and while traveling. In addition, restaurant management **saves time and money** by utilizing an online system to easily and quickly call up or revise nutrition facts of new or updated menu items.

If customers don't ask for nutrition facts, is there really a demand for them?

Yes. Since most restaurants do not offer menu labeling, your customers may not think it's available. However, public opinion surveys indicate that **between 67 and 84 percent** of respondents support nutrition labeling in restaurants. NRA studies also show that **three out of four adults** are trying to eat healthier in restaurants than **they were two years ago**. In addition, numerous professional organizations are researching the powerful impact nutrition labeling has, and will have, on businesses and their customers.

Wendy Hess, RD, CDE is a consultant to the restaurant industry, offering recipe nutrient analysis, food labeling compliance, menu consulting, food allergy training, and an Interactive Nutrition Calculator for your website.

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