Labeling "Calories In" and "Calories Out" Plays a Positive Role in Food Choices Among Adults and Children

A recent study in Pediatrics (January 2015) and another in Appetite (July 2013), support the positive benefits of calorie labeling on smarter food choices in the fast food world. Calorie experts and authors of The Calories In, Calories Out Cookbook are pioneers in bringing calorie information and physical activity labeling to the cookbook world.

Bethesda, MD (PRWEB) January 30, 2015 -- Calorie labeling is the new trend, and it looks like it's here to stay. As calorie awareness increases among the general population -- with the use of weight-tracking apps and other devices and menu postings -- the public is beginning to expect this information on all foods. The authors of The Calories In, Calories Out Cookbook think it should be in cookbooks too. They are the first to offer both calories in and calories out values in the cookbook arena.

The power of labeling has positive effects on food choices. “There is no question that knowing how many calories are in a dish and how much exercise is needed to burn them off affects the decision to eat that food,” said Catherine Jones, chef and award-winning author and blogger turned health-focused home cook and project director of the Share Your Calories Nonprofit.

New research has found that parents shown menus with calorie labels may order fast food meals totaling fewer calories for their children. Adding labels that reveal the minutes to walk to burn the calories in the food item, or calories plus miles to walk to burn the calories in the food item, may be more likely to influence parents to encourage their children to exercise.

The study that came out on January 26, 2015 in the journal of Pediatrics, surveyed parents and asked them to choose items for their children from a fast food menu. The parents were given menus with either no labels, calories only, calories plus minutes, or calories plus miles needed to walk to burn the calories. Parents were asked to choose what they would order for their child.

Interestingly, parents whose menus displayed calorie and or physical activity information ordered approximately 200 fewer average calories for their children than those parents whose menus displayed no labels. The calorie differences were mostly due to differences in burger and dessert calories.

The results are not surprising to co-authors of the critically acclaimed new cookbook, The Calories In, Calories Out Cookbook, Catherine Jones, and Elaine Trujillo, MS RDN. "Providing calorie and physical activity information can be a helpful tool in making healthy choices. It’s very encouraging to learn that parents exposed to labels made better choices," said Jones and Trujillo.

In a similar study in adults in July 2013, those shown fast food labels depicting calories and miles to walk to burn those calories ordered on average about 100 fewer calories than when shown calorie information alone (Appetite 2013;62:173).

In light of the fact that about one-third of the average American's diet is consumed at restaurants, the findings from these studies become even more relevant. The FDA recently ruled that chain restaurants list calorie information on menus and menu boards. List physical activity values to burn calories may be an additional way for consumers to understand calorie information.
Although in the Pediatrics study, physical activity labeling did not seem to have a greater influence on parent's decision-making of food choices, calorie labeling of any type led parents to choose lower-calorie items.

The study also found that providing labels with physical activity equivalents, regardless of whether shown in minutes or miles were significantly more influential at prompting parents to encourage their children to exercise.

"This is good news, especially since the majority of our children are not getting enough exercise," says Trujillo. The US Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Unfortunately, only 42% of 6- to 11-year olds and only 8% of 12- to 15-year-olds approach this level of physical activity, these findings are relevant.

CATHERINE JONES a chef is the award-winning author or coauthor of numerous cookbooks including The Calories In, Calories Out Cookbook, Eating for Pregnancy, and Eating for Lower Cholesterol. She is the co-founder of the nonprofit Share Your Calories, an app developer, blogger, and a freelance journalist. ELAINE TRUJILLO, MS, RDN, is a nutritionist who has years of experience promoting nutrition and health and has written numerous scientific journal articles, chapters and textbooks.
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