



Find the full report at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib127

Consumers' Use of Nutrition Information When Eating Out

Christian A. Gregory, Ilya Rahkovsky, and Tobenna D. Anekwe

What Is the Issue?

One strategy for helping Americans improve their diets is to make nutrition information more widely available. A practical problem for this strategy has been the recent increase in household reliance on food away from home (FAFH); this food has not, on the whole, been subject to the same nutrition-labeling requirements as food items sold to be prepared and eaten at home (FAH). In response to this problem, the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires all restaurants with 20 or more locations to provide nutrition information on menus. The Food and Drug Administration is working to fully implement this provision of the law.

Given these upcoming changes, it would be helpful to know who already uses nutrition information that eating establishments provide voluntarily and who might use such information when it becomes widely available because of the new regulations. What are the demographic and diet-related characteristics of those who already use nutrition information when eating out and those who say they would use such information if it were available? Would more nutrition information in FAFH settings prompt the average consumer to make better choices?

What Did the Study Find?

Based on responses to the 2007-08 and 2009-10 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the authors find that the use of nutrition information at full-service restaurants (FSRs) and fast-food/pizza establishments (FFs) is strongly and positively correlated with certain dietary habits, diet quality, and demographic characteristics:

- Of consumers who eat out, those who eat out more frequently are less likely to use nutrition information at FAFH venues than those who eat out occasionally.

ERS is a primary source of economic research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

- Use of nutrition information is correlated with other diet-related behaviors. For example, those who say they “always” or “most of the time” keep dark green vegetables at home are much more likely to use nutrition information at FSRs than those who say they “rarely” or “never” keep such vegetables at home.
- Those who rate their diets as poor are less likely to use nutrition information on the menu at FFs or FSRs than consumers who rate their diets as excellent or very good.
- Of the people who saw nutrition information during their last visit to a fast-food restaurant, women and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants are much more likely to have used that information than men or individuals not participating in SNAP.

In addition, we find a strong correlation between whether consumers say they *would* use nutrition information at FFs and FSRs if it were available and the quality of their diets. Consumers who intend to use the information when they eat out have higher scores in USDA’s Healthy Eating Index and consume less sugar.

How Was the Study Conducted?

This analysis uses data from the 2007-08 and 2009-10 Flexible Consumer Behavior Survey module (FCBS) of the NHANES to examine the relationship between Americans’ use of nutrition information and their demographic and health-related characteristics. The FCBS asks consumers about their food shopping and spending habits, self-perceived diet quality, familiarity with U.S. Department of Agriculture dietary guidance, and use of nutrition information. The FCBS followup survey by phone, which focuses on attitudes toward nutrition information in FAFH settings, is central to the analysis.