

Making healthy eating decisions just got a little easier

A federal rule mandating restaurants, ice cream shops, bakeries and movie theaters to post calories on menus or menu boards went into effect nationwide earlier this week. The law applies to any place selling prepared food items with 20 or more locations. They must also be able to supply other nutritional information such as fat content and number of carbs if requested. It's a welcome move for health advocates across the country.

Calorie Ashley Simper-1 :14 ...what's important."

"What this does is it allows transparency," said Ashley Simper, community and outpatient dietician at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center at the Riverplex. "It allows us to see exactly what we're going to get and it allows consumers to make a choice which I think for nutrition overall...choice is what's important."

With people eating about one-third of their calories outside the home, the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believes the new rule has the ability to reduce consumption by up to 50 calories a day on average. Simper says openness of nutritional facts is also driving restaurants to take another look at their offerings.

Calorie Ashley Simper-2 :16 ...their menu."

"It could deter people from ordering what they normally would if they see it has 1500 calories in a taco salad, for example," said Simper. "So, it's really forcing them to make healthy changes to their menu."

Simper says she believes the FDA is moving in the right direction with its goal to encourage long-term health benefits for the nation. On the con side, she says businesses could be hurt by the action due to the costs associated with printing new materials that include dietary information. Simper notes many of these restaurants impacted by the federal mandate already have posted nutritional facts on their respective websites.

Overall, Simper says the menu labeling directive allows people across the U.S. to make informed decisions when ordering takeout, a necessity for those attempting to limit bad foods in their diets.