

# Industry Weekly Digest

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management



## Calorie Labelling

Six months into obligatory calorie labelling on menus for qualifying businesses, how has it gone? I would suggest it is a variable feast for both operators and consumers. I have seen examples of grossly inaccurate calorie counts, in one case making the 'healthy' option appear anything but. I have witnessed consumers disappointed not to find calorie counts and not understanding why they are not provided. I have noted people who have been shocked by the calorie counts of favourite dishes or using calorie counts as the final arbiter in menu decisions- going for the less calorific version.

In this digest, **Professor Anita Eves** considers if the scheme is indeed working, raising awareness and making people think more about their options.

Have a great Weekend!



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# Six Months into mandatory calorie labelling

**Professor Anita Eves**

Some businesses that might be expected to 'qualify' have escaped, when outlets within a group are registered as individual businesses - even a well-known spa business where you might expect clients to be interested! Such businesses are often high-end operators that most people would not visit regularly. In that context, **Thomasina Miers** has suggested that calories are a 'red herring', and that it is a blunt instrument, not recognising the overall nutrient value and thus other benefits of consuming a food. However, in the fight against obesity, there is no doubt that consuming more calories than you burn will eventually lead to weight gain. The hospitality sector is only part of the problem, however, when people eat out regularly, and too much, in some outlets. It should not be vilified as a root cause of the obesity epidemic, given that most meals are eaten in the home, and that a more sedentary life is part of the equation. That said, **Yeo (2022)**, reviewing the impact of menu calorie labelling, concluded that it was reasonable to expect a small reduction in calories per transaction (circa 78 calories), although whether this would be maintained, or reach those at most risk of obesity, remains less certain.



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Recent **research** by Feed-it-back reported that 41% of 60,000 diners, particularly younger diners, would change their choices if calories are visible, while 48% were not interested. **CGA by NielsonIQ** found that 49% would change their menu choice based on calories, particularly for dishes containing more than 1,000 calories, again with younger age groups more likely to pay attention. **Lumina Intelligence**, speaking with foodservice professionals, however, suggests little impact on choice, albeit that some did report shifts to alternate menu items. Comments included that consumers were unhappy about calorie labelling as it spoilt treat occasions. Interestingly, menu trends, point to new dishes being more calorific, and making more ingredients optional (and thus not in the substantive menu item calorie count), feeding the trend for customisable experiences. No doubt, for many, calculation of calories has been an onerous task, with 88% of hospitality businesses not receiving support to implement the new requirement. It appears, however, that things could change again with our new Prime Minister peddling back on many of the anti-obesity strategies of her predecessor - including menu calorie labelling. Watch this space.....