

Menu calorie data may prompt parents to encourage exercise

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(HealthDay)—Parents might order fewer calories for their children if menus included calorie counts or information on how much walking would be required to burn off the calories in foods, according to a study published online Jan. 26 in *Pediatrics*.

Anthony Viera, M.D., M.P.H., and Ray Antonelli, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, surveyed 1,000 [parents](#) of [children](#) aged 2 to 17 years. The average age of the children was 9.5 years. The parents were asked to look at mock menus and make choices about food they would order for their children. Some menus had no calorie or exercise information. Another group of menus only had [calorie information](#). A third group included calories and details about how many minutes a typical adult would have to walk to burn off the calories. The fourth

group of menus included information about calories and how many miles it would take to walk them off.

The researchers found that parents mock-ordered slightly less food, calorie-wise, when their menus included the extra information. With no calorie numbers, they ordered an average of 1,294 calories worth of food for their children. When calorie or exercise information was included, parents ordered 1,060 to 1,099 calories per meal, according to the study. Meanwhile, about 38 percent of parents said they'd be "very likely" to encourage their children to exercise if they saw labels with information about minutes or miles of activity required to burn off calories. Only 20 percent said they'd be moved to encourage exercise if they just saw calorie numbers alone.

While the study findings suggest that including [calorie counts](#) or exercise amounts might prompt parents to order fewer [calories](#) per meal for their children, the study has limitations. For one thing, no one actually ordered anything; the study scenario was hypothetical. Also, children weren't part of the study, so it didn't reflect their food preferences and requests.

"There are many factors that come into play such as cost, time pressure, marketing, and the child's preferences," Viera told *HealthDay*. The hope is that labels with extra [information](#) will "provide a simple-to-understand snapshot of [calorie content](#) that will make it easier for parents to make healthier choices for themselves and their children in the context of all of these competing factors."

More information: [Abstract](#)
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