

Pass on the salt? NYC board to vote on menu sodium warnings

September 9 2015, by Jennifer Peltz



Chain restaurants across New York City may soon be compelled to add a new item to their menus: a salt-warning symbol.

The city Board of Health is set to vote Wednesday on a groundbreaking rule that would slap a black-and-white salt-shaker emblem on chain-eatery dishes with more than the recommended daily limit of 2,300 milligrams—about a teaspoon—of sodium. It could include foods ranging from BLT sandwiches to fried chicken to even some salads.

New York would be the first U.S. city with such a requirement, which comes as officials and experts urge Americans to eat healthier. It

furthering a series of novel nutritional efforts in the nation's biggest city.

City officials say they're just saying "know," not "no," about foods high in a substance that experts say is too prevalent in most Americans' diets, raising the risk of [high blood pressure](#) and potentially heart attacks and strokes. Public health advocates applaud the proposal, but salt producers and restaurateurs call it a misguided step toward an onslaught of confusing warnings.

The average American consumes about 3,400 mg of salt, or sodium, each day. Only about one in 10 Americans meets the 1 teaspoon guideline.

The vast majority of dietary salt comes from processed and restaurant food, studies show. Consumers may not realize how much sodium is in, say, a Panera Bread Smokehouse Turkey Panini (2,590 mg), TGI Friday's sesame jack chicken strips (2,700 mg), a regular-size Applebee's Grilled Shrimp 'n Spinach Salad (2,990 mg) or a Subway foot-long spicy Italian sub (2,980 mg).

"There are few other areas in which public health could do more to save lives," Michael Jacobson, executive director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, an advocacy group, said at a city Health Department hearing in July. Indeed, some health experts have urged the city to set the warning limit as low as 500 mg.

But the Salt Institute, a trade association for salt producers, has said the proposal is based on "incorrect government targets" called into question by recent research. Last year, an international study involving 100,000 people suggested that most folks' salt consumption was actually OK for heart health, adding that both way too much and too little salt can do harm. Other scientists fault the study and say most people still consume way too much salt.

Restaurant owners say healthy-eating initiatives should focus on diet as a whole, not particular ingredients or foods. They want the city to leave salt warnings to federal authorities. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is working on new sodium guidelines.

"The concern, at some point, is that warning labels and the confluence of warnings on menus will lead to a collective shrug by consumers ... as every item on a menu will be flagged as inappropriate in one way or another," James Versocki, a lawyer for the New York State Restaurant Association's New York City chapter, said at the July hearing.

Still, at least one eatery chain, Panera Bread, has expressed support for the city's proposal. If passed, it would take effect Dec. 1.

In recent years, New York City has pioneered banning trans fats from restaurant meals and forcing chain eateries to post calorie counts on menus. It led development of voluntary salt-reduction targets for various table staples and tried, unsuccessfully, to limit the size of some sugary drinks. Restaurant representatives criticizing the [salt](#) proposal have noted that courts struck down the big-soda ban as overreaching by the [health](#) board.

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