

## McDonald's to Add Facts on Nutrition to Packaging



What the new McDonald's cheeseburger wrapper will look like in the United States with the nutritional information.

By **MELANIE WARNER**

Published: October 26, 2005

CHICAGO, Oct. 25 - That Double Quarter Pounder With Cheese? It has 730 calories. A Sausage Biscuit With Egg? It will

### Related

[Text of McDonald's News](#)

Release (October 25, 2005)

use up 49 percent of an adult's daily recommended fat intake.

That information and more will be on the packaging of most [McDonald's](#) food items starting next year, the company announced at a news conference in a Chicago restaurant Tuesday. The

[nutrition](#) labeling, which is intended to be even easier to read than the labels on packaged foods, will tell customers how many calories, grams of fat, protein, carbohydrates and sodium are in each product and will include a chart showing the percentage of the government's recommended daily intakes.

Such information is already available to consumers in brochures in McDonald's restaurants and on the company's Web site. But McDonald's executives said Tuesday that they had decided to make it more available and more accessible to customers. "This format makes it easier to understand and to read our nutrition information," said Cathy Kapica, global director of nutrition at McDonald's.

McDonald's said the new packaging would be in 20,000 of its 30,000 restaurants worldwide by the end of 2006.

The move comes as McDonald's, the world's largest restaurant company, continues to face criticism for contributing to rising [obesity](#) rates and other health problems.

It has also been sued by customers who claimed they became fat by eating McDonald's foods, although only one case is still pending. In addition, McDonald's was the subject of "Super Size Me," a movie released in 2004 in which the filmmaker Morgan Spurlock chronicled the nutritional dangers of eating too much fast food.

Still, McDonald's approach to labeling represents a significant detour from the approach that nutrition groups and several legislators have been pushing for. Earlier this year, Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat who is the ranking minority member on the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, introduced a bill that would require all chain restaurants with more than 20 outlets to list calories, fat and sodium on menus and menu boards, not on individual products.

Michael Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a vocal nutrition group that supports Senator Harkin's bill, said he thought McDonald's new initiative did not go far enough and would ultimately have little impact on consumer health. He said he would like to see calories also listed on the menu boards customers look at when deciding what to order.

"This information on the package is useful, but it doesn't offer people an opportunity to compare products," Mr. Jacobson said. "Having it on the menu board would spur a lot of people to switch to a smaller order of fries, a diet soda, or a regular hamburger instead of a cheeseburger, for instance."

Mr. Jacobson also said that menu labeling would require McDonald's to tell customers before they order that the various combo meals can have as many as 1,000 calories. With McDonald's package labeling, customers have to do the math.

Michael Roberts, McDonald's president and chief operating officer, said the company opposed menu board labeling because it would require restaurants to be constantly updating the board and because it could be confusing for customers.

"It gets complicated when you have different variations of products and seasonal items that you're adding," Mr. Roberts said. "We think this is the simplest way for customers to get this information."

Unlike manufacturers of packaged food sold in grocery stores, restaurants are not required by law to publish any information about their products' ingredients or nutritional components. As Americans spend more money in restaurants and less in grocery stores, nutrition advocates have become concerned that consumers have no way of knowing what they are eating.

While McDonald's said that its new labeling was all about helping the customer, one legal expert noted that it might also help the company on the legal front. McDonald's has been singled out in at least three suits related to obesity and nutrition.

"If they have the information out there, easy to understand and in people's faces, then at that point the burden of responsibility switches to people protecting themselves," said Richard A. Daynard, associate dean at Northeastern University School of Law and head of its Obesity and Law Project at the Public Health Advocacy Institute. "It's a very strong argument and one McDonald's hasn't had until now."

Ralph Alvarez, McDonald's president for North America, said he hoped the new labels would open consumers' eyes to McDonald's range of choices. "The options are better in many cases than they think," he said.

McDonald's packaging will also provide a nutrition facts panel listing trans fat, saturated fat, fiber, sugar and certain nutrients.

Whether the prominent display of all this information will have any effect on what people order at McDonald's is unclear. John Glass, a restaurant analyst at CIBC, said that from a financial point of view, the company was taking a "calculated risk."

"If people started eating less Big Macs and Double Cheeseburgers, it would be a problem," Mr. Glass said. "Those are nice high-margin items for McDonald's."

According to Wade Thoma, vice president for menu management at McDonald's, Double Cheeseburgers, Chicken McNuggets and Big Macs are the three most ordered items at McDonald's in the United States.

James A. Skinner, McDonald's chief executive, told reporters that he hoped that the new labeling would encourage other fast-food competitors to follow suit. "We would like to have our leadership be followed by others, because nutrition information is important in terms of how people pursue their balanced lifestyles," he said.

So far, other chains are not responding. YUM Brands, which owns KFC, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut, said it had no plans to provide labeling on packaging. Jonathan Blum, a spokesman, said that the company already offered nutrition brochures in its stores and information on its Web site. "We think that placing information on the packaging that people see after they order their food isn't helpful for making choices," Mr. Blum said.

A spokeswoman for Burger King, a unit of Texas Pacific, said the company already posted nutritional information on its Web site and had no plans to do labeling.