

## Resolution to Support Nutrition Labeling and Nutritionally Improved Menu Offerings in Fast-Food and Other Chain Restaurants

Whereas the Society for Nutrition Education is concerned and working to address the rising obesity rates in adults and children, and poor eating habits contribute not only to obesity, but also to heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, and other serious and costly diseases;

Whereas nationally representative studies have shown that Americans are eating out twice as much as in 1970,<sup>1</sup> and adults and children are eating on average one-third of their calories from away-from-home foods;<sup>2</sup>

Whereas obesity rates have doubled in adults and tripled in children and youth over the last two decades, so that almost one third of children and two-thirds of adults are either overweight or obese;<sup>3</sup>

Whereas studies link eating out to higher calorie consumption, overweight, and obesity in both adults and children,<sup>2,4-12</sup> and it is not uncommon for restaurant entrees to contain one half to one whole day's worth of calories (1,100 to 2,350 cal);<sup>13</sup>

Whereas foods that people eat from fast-food and other food-service establishments are generally higher in nutrients for which over-consumption is a problem (such as fat and saturated fat) and lower in nutrients that people need to eat more of (such as calcium and fiber) as compared to home-prepared foods;<sup>2,5,6,9,10,12,14</sup>

Whereas the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA) requires nutrition information on nearly all packaged foods, restaurants are exempt;

Whereas less than half (44%) of the largest chain restaurants provide nutrition information to their customers for the majority of their standard menu items,<sup>15</sup> and those that do have nutrition information, usually provide it on Web sites, which generally have to be accessed before leaving for the restaurant, or on brochures or posters that may be hard to find and difficult to read;

Whereas evidence suggests that when nutrition information is available, people are likely to use it; three-quarters of adults report using food labels on packaged foods,<sup>16</sup> and using food labels on packaged food is associated with eating more-healthy diets;<sup>17-19</sup>

Whereas consumers, and even nutrition professionals, are not able to accurately estimate the caloric content of restaurant foods,<sup>20,21</sup> and studies have found that the provision of nutrition information for away-from-home foods can have a positive influence on food-purchase decisions;<sup>20,22-25</sup>

Whereas two-thirds of Americans support requiring restaurants to provide nutrition information, including calories, on menus;<sup>26,27</sup>

Whereas the Food and Drug Administration's report, *The Keystone Forum on Away-from-Home Foods: Opportunities for Preventing Weight Gain and Obesity*, recommends that restaurants and other food-service establishments provide calorie information in a standard format that is easy to access and easy for customers to see and use as a part of their purchasing and eating decisions;<sup>28</sup>

Whereas a key benefit of mandatory nutrition labeling on packaged foods has been the reformulation of existing products and the introduction of new, nutritionally improved products.<sup>29</sup> Between 1991 (before the implementation of the NLEA) and 1995 (after implementation), the number of available fat-modified cheese products tripled, and the market share for fat-modified cookies increased from zero percent of the market to 15%.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, nutrition labeling on menus and menu boards may spur nutritional improvements in restaurant foods.

Be it resolved that SNE urges:

1. Federal, state or local policies to require fast-food and other chain restaurants (smaller, neighborhood restaurants could be exempt) to provide consumers with nutrition information. That information should include calorie, carbohydrate, saturated plus trans fat, and sodium labeling on printed menus and calories on menu boards, where space is limited. Information on carbohydrates is important to people with diabetes. Saturated and trans fat content is needed by people with high cholesterol or heart disease, and sodium information is important to people with high blood pressure. Nutrition information should be provided in a standard format that is easily accessible and easy to use;
2. Federal and state health agencies, health organizations, and health and nutrition professionals, including SNE members, to teach people how to use the nutrition information provided in restaurants to make healthier food choices for themselves and their families; and
3. Restaurants to improve the nutritional quality of their menu offerings, for example by reducing caloric content, offering smaller portions, offering more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, using healthier cooking fats (lower in saturated and trans fat), and using less added sugars/sweeteners.

## References

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## Addendum:

1. Title: Resolution to Support Nutrition Labeling and Nutritionally Improved Menu Offerings in Fast-Food and Other Chain Restaurants

2. Drafted: September 16, 2005. Updated: May 19, 2006.

3. Contact person for future communications:

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4. SNE members endorsing the resolution:

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5. List of people from whom input has been sought: A thorough review of the public health and medical literature was completed in drafting this resolution. This work was also informed by participation in Food and Drug Administration's workshops on away-from-home foods facilitated by the Keystone Center, at which there were presentations by a diverse group of stakeholders including many chain restaurants and industry analysts. The resolution was reviewed by Jennifer Wilkins, PhD, RD, Barbara Storper, Leslie Mikkelsen, MS, RD, Marilyn Briggs, Melinda Hemmelgarn, MS, RD, Tracy Fox, MS RD.

6. Primary audience for this resolution: SNE members, SNE Board of Directors, and the SNE Advisory Committee on Public Policy (ACPP).

7. Relevancy of the resolution and its intended outcomes to SNE's mission or activities: SNE is dedicated to promoting healthy, sustainable food choices and has a vision of healthy people in healthy communities. This resolution supports the goal of working to make environments more supportive of healthy eating habits. This resolution extends SNE's longtime support for the NLEA by calling for nutrition labeling at fast-food and other chain restaurants.

Nutrition labeling at chain restaurants is an important way help support Americans' efforts to eat better given how much of our caloric intake is consumed at restaurants, the large portion sizes and high calorie contents often served, and the lack of nutrition information at most restaurants. It also is a practical, low-cost solution in these times of tight government budgets. However, a number of policies and approaches will, of course, be needed to address good nutrition and obesity.

A wide range of view points was considered. A thorough review of the public health and medical literature was completed in drafting this resolution. This work was informed by participation in Food and Drug Administration's workshops on away-from-home foods facilitated by the Keystone Center, at which there were presentations by a diverse group of stakeholders including many chain restaurants and industry analysts. The resolution was reviewed by Jennifer Wilkins, PhD, RD, Barbara Storper, Leslie Mikkelsen, MS, RD, Marilyn Briggs, Melinda Hemmelgarn, MS, RD, Tracy Fox, MS RD.

8. Projected outcomes of this resolution and ways it will be used: The introduction of the resolution will provide an opportunity for discussion of the issue of menu labeling among SNE members. If passed, this resolution will be advisory to SNE's Board and Advisory Committee on Public Policy (ACPP). A discussion and vote on this resolution will help SNE and ACPP gauge the extent of support among SNE's membership regarding addressing the issue of menu labeling and will help guide SNE's advocacy efforts around this issue.

9. Additional support requested from SNE's administrative staff or volunteers: The SNE staff will be requested to assist with the process of voting if the resolution is presented at the Annual Meeting. If the resolution passes, the staff will be asked to put the resolution on the SNE website. Other than this, any support from volunteers would occur in the course of regular Board or ACPP activities. SNE volunteers could support this policy by advocating for menu labeling policies at the federal, state or local level through meetings, phone calls or letters to key decision makers, such as legislators and state or local health departments or boards of health. Costs to implement this resolution would be minimal.