

Nutritional Quality at Eight U.S. Fast-Food Chains: 14-Year Trends

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Nutritional Quality of Menu Offerings at Eight Fast-Food Chains in the U.S.: A Commentary

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Background

Frequent consumption of fast-food menu items that are high in fat, sugar, and sodium contribute to poor dietary quality, increasing individuals' risk for diet-related chronic diseases.

Purpose

To assess 14-year trends in the nutritional quality of menu offerings at eight fast-food restaurant chains in the U.S.

Methods

Data on menu items and food and nutrient composition were obtained in 2011 from archival versions of the University of Minnesota Nutrition Coordinating Center Food and Nutrient Database for eight fast-food restaurant chains. In this database, ingredient and nutrition information for all foods sold by the fast-food restaurants were updated biannually between 1997/1998 and 2009/2010. Healthy Eating Index (HEI)-2005 scores were calculated for each restaurant menu as a measure of the extent to which menu offerings were consistent with *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and compared over time.

Results

Of a possible index total of 100 (healthiest), the HEI-2005 score across all eight fast-food restaurants was 45 in 1997/1998 and 48 in 2009/2010. Individually, restaurant scores in 1997/1998 ranged from 37 to 56 and in 2009/2010 ranged from 38 to 56. The greatest improvements in nutritional quality were seen in the increase of meat/beans, decrease in saturated fat, and decrease in the proportion of calories from solid fats and added sugars. The HEI-2005 score improved in six restaurants and decreased in two.

Conclusions

The nutritional quality of menu offerings at fast-food restaurant chains included in this study increased over time, but further improvements are needed. Fast-food restaurants have an opportunity to contribute to a healthy diet for Americans by improving the nutritional quality of their menus.