

Fight Obesity and Become an Original Cosponsor of The Restaurant Information Act of 2003

October 20, 2003

Dear Colleague:

I know that many of you share my concern about the rising obesity rates in adults and children, and how they are impacting the health and well being of our citizens and the nation's health care costs. Although obesity is a complex problem caused by a number of factors, one important contributor is the increase in dining out and the lack of nutrition information in restaurants.

In the coming weeks, I will introduce the **Restaurant Information Act of 2003**, legislation that extends nutrition labeling beyond packaged foods to include foods at fast-food and other chain restaurants (locally owned, neighborhood restaurants would be exempt). The bill would require fast-food and other chain restaurants to list calories, saturated plus trans fat and sodium on printed menus and calories on menu boards (where space is limited).

Obesity is one of the most pressing health issues of our time. It affects 65% of adults and rates are rising rapidly. Over the last twenty years, obesity rates have doubled in adults and children and tripled in teens. Obesity costs the nation \$117 billion a year in health care and related costs.

Nutrition information at restaurants is needed now more than ever. American adults and children now eat a third of their calories at restaurants and other food service establishments. When people eat out, they do not eat as well as when they eat at home. They eat more saturated fat and calories and less calcium, fiber, fruits and vegetables.

In 1990, Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA), requiring food manufacturers to provide nutrition information on nearly all packaged foods. Restaurants were exempt. So while people have good nutrition information in supermarkets, at restaurants they can only guess. And guessing is not easy. At a typical deli, a tuna salad sandwich has 50% more calories than the roast beef with mustard. A porterhouse steak has twice the calories of the sirloin.

Listing calories on menus and menu boards would provide customers with more information on available choices. Three-quarters of adults report using the food labels on packaged foods, and reading labels is associated with eating more healthful diets. Mandatory nutrition labeling on packaged foods also has resulted in the reformulation of existing products and the introduction of new nutritionally-improved products. Labeling could lead to restaurants competing with each other on the basis of improved nutrition, not just price.

To become an original cosponsor, or to obtain additional information, please contact Josh Farrelman (5-3661) in my office. I look forward to working with you on this important public health issue.

Sincerely,



ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress