

# NUTRIENT WARNINGS ON CHAIN RESTAURANT MENUS



**Extra Small**  
\$.99  
110 Cal.



**Small**  
\$1.00  
150 Cal. ⚠



**Medium**  
\$1.29  
210 Cal. ⚠



**Large**  
\$1.59  
290 Cal. ⚠



Item exceeds the total daily recommended limit for added sugars (50g) based on a 2,000-calorie diet. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines advises limiting added sugars.



**Short Stack Pancakes**  
\$3.99  
670 Cal.



**Full Stack Pancakes**  
\$4.99  
880 Cal. ⚠



**Strawberry Pancakes**  
\$5.99  
950 Cal. ⚠



The sodium (salt) content of this items is higher than the total daily recommended limit (2,300 mg). High sodium intake can increase blood pressure and risk of heart disease and stroke.

## A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES

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CENTER FOR  
Science IN THE  
Public Interest

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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT



For more than 50 years, CSPI has been an influential force in the fight for a better food system. We are committed to partnering with communities, organizations, and individuals as they explore and enact innovative policies at the local, state, and federal level that advance a just and equitable food environment. CSPI leverages our unique expertise to support passing policies that increase access to nutritious food, support healthy food and beverage choices, and ensure a healthy diet for those that experience the greatest health disparities.

A crucial part of this work is helping to build the capacity of our partners and other community-based organizations around the country. To this end, we have developed policy toolkits for CSPI's priority issue areas, including the one you have here. These toolkits are living documents designed to support your advocacy, whether you're a seasoned pro looking for the latest research or are brand new to this issue and trying to figure out where to begin. We've structured this toolkit as a roadmap to guide your campaign, with academic research, case studies, model policies, messaging guidance, and other resources you may need. Included throughout are links to additional resources, developed by CSPI and by our partners, for your deeper learning. We also invite you to explore CSPI's [Resource Hub](#) and [Resource Library](#) for more tools that you may find useful.



# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This toolkit is intended to support advocates who want to lead campaigns calling for state and local nutrient warnings on restaurant menus. We outline how nutrient warnings can be used to reduce the purchases of unhealthy foods and drinks, encourage reformulation, and build stronger, healthier, more resilient communities that are better prepared to withstand future public health challenges.

For years, the fast-food and fast casual restaurant industries have promoted and normalized foods and drinks with exceedingly high levels of nutrients like sodium and added sugars, which Americans consume in excess of levels recommended by health authorities,<sup>1</sup> and which are linked to increased risk of disease. Chronic diseases linked to poor diet, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and kidney disease, threaten the health and vitality of communities. These conditions are leading causes of death and disability in the US<sup>2</sup> and put individuals at greater risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and other illnesses.<sup>3</sup> As Americans look to build healthier food systems, we have an opportunity to take a fresh look at food environments, including tackling the high levels of added sugars and sodium served in our foods.

## HOW RESTAURANT FOOD IMPACTS HEALTH

Food sold at chain restaurants has a substantial impact on our diet. As of 2016, fast food restaurants served more than one in three American adults on a given day,<sup>4</sup> or 84.8 million adults. In addition, trends in household purchases of food away from home (i.e., foods purchased from restaurants and fast-food places as opposed to supermarkets or convenience stores) have increased over the last 30 years in the United States.<sup>5</sup> By 2019, these purchases accounted for more than half of total food expenditures.<sup>6</sup>

While restaurant sales in the U.S. dropped in 2020 due to measures implemented to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, monthly sales have rebounded, and reached a new all-time high of \$82 billion in revenue in March 2022.<sup>7</sup>



## CHAIN RESTAURANT FOOD IS EXTREMELY HIGH IN SODIUM AND ADDED SUGARS

For years, the chain restaurant industry has fueled its growth by promoting and normalizing foods and drinks that are high in sodium and added sugars. These highly palatable (but highly unhealthy) menu items get us hooked and keep us coming back for more. Individual meals from chain restaurants regularly approach or exceed the recommended limit<sup>8</sup> on the amount of sodium or added sugars that a person should consume in an entire day, making it nearly impossible to regularly consume these foods while also maintaining a healthy diet.

The average nutrient profile of a fast food default combination meal (i.e. hamburger, fries, and soda) in the U.S. includes 2,110 milligrams of sodium and 68 grams of sugar, values that approach the daily limit for sodium (2,300 milligrams) and exceed the daily limit for added sugars (50 grams)<sup>9</sup> (See *fig 1*).<sup>10</sup> Much of the added sugar in restaurant meals comes from sugary drinks, and most consumers who buy a sugary drink at chain restaurants get a beverage that contains enough drinkable calories to supply a full day's worth of added sugar.<sup>11</sup>

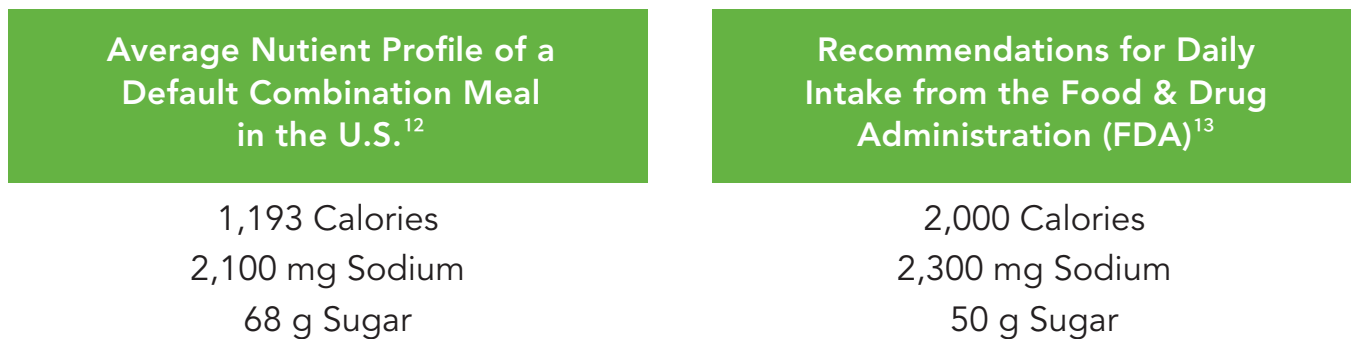
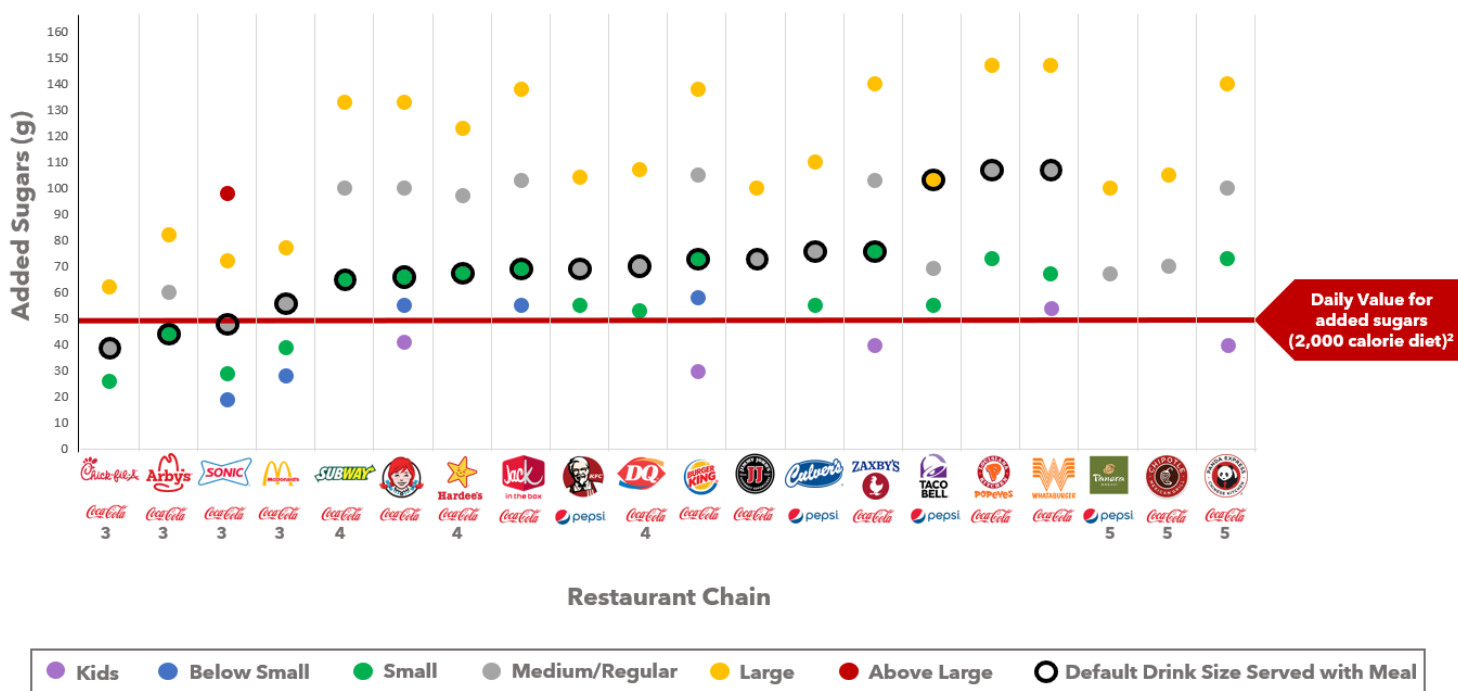


Figure 1: The average nutrient profile of a default combination meal in the US vs. FDA recommended values

Often, restaurants market extreme meals that could rarely be consumed in a healthy diet as ordinary, everyday choices. A report published by CSPI in 2021, [Sweet Excess](#), documents that even most “small” size drinks from chain restaurants contain at least a full day’s worth, most “medium” or “regular” drinks contain at least 1 ½ days’ worth, and most “large” contain 2 days’ worth.<sup>14</sup>



## Added Sugars<sup>1</sup> (g) in Full-Calorie Cola Fountain Drinks at Top 20 Chain Restaurants



- <sup>1</sup> Converted from total sugars reported by chain; most chains assume 0% ice fill / 100% drink fill line
- <sup>2</sup> 2,000 calorie Daily Value is for adults and children ages 4+
- <sup>3</sup> Chains assume 1/3 to full cup ice fill (See Appendix, Table 2)
- <sup>4</sup> No nutrition information reported by chain; CSPI estimate assumes 0% ice fill / 100% drink fill line
- <sup>5</sup> No default drink served with meal

Figure 2: Added Sugars in Full Calorie Cola Fountain Drinks at Top Chains

Restaurant foods also account for much of the sodium we eat. Over 70 percent of the sodium Americans eat daily is consumed at restaurants or from processed foods, rather than food prepared from scratch at home.<sup>15</sup>

These unhealthy offerings can translate into negative health outcomes for restaurant customers. Studies have shown that people who eat more foods away from home tend to have a higher body mass index, consume less fruits and vegetables, and be more likely to show other early signs of being at greater risk for cardiovascular disease than those who eat more of their food at home.<sup>15, 16</sup>

Consumers also struggle to detect and evaluate the levels of sodium and added sugars in restaurant menu items. One study found that adult Americans underestimated the sodium content in restaurant meals they had purchased by an average of more than 1,000 milligrams.<sup>18</sup> A survey conducted by CSPI in 2021 showed that when consumers were asked to select which menu items contained more than a day's worth of added sugars, respondents only identified the items correctly about half (49%) of the time.<sup>19</sup> In another national survey, three in four respondents did not know the daily recommended limit for added sugars, and half reported difficulty determining how much sugar they are eating.<sup>20</sup>

Policies that effectively reduce the content of these nutrients in restaurant foods, and ultimately reduce the amount consumed, would improve public health. Even small improvements in the nutrition of restaurant foods, if applied consistently across an entire population, could have a big impact on population health.

## SODIUM REDUCTION AND HEALTH

Excessive sodium intake increases risk for hypertension (high blood pressure),<sup>20, 21</sup> which in turn raises the risk of heart attack and stroke.<sup>23</sup>

Randomized controlled trials have also shown that reducing dietary sodium is an effective way to lower blood pressure and reduce risk for heart disease.<sup>24</sup> For people with hypertension, reducing sodium intake from high to low levels can reduce systolic blood pressure by 7-10 mm Hg, a reduction that is comparable to the effects of some medications.<sup>25, 26</sup>

There is a strong consensus among our nation's leading experts that sodium intake should be limited to 2,300 mg per day or less, Americans are nowhere near meeting that daily target. Over 90 percent of people living in the United States consume excessive sodium, with an average daily intake of 3,393 mg of sodium a day (1 ½ teaspoon), nearly one and a half times the recommended limit.<sup>27</sup>

Policies to effectively reduce sodium in Americans' diets could have profound benefits for the health of communities. Researchers have estimated that reducing Americans' sodium by about a third (1,200 mg) would prevent between 44,000 and 92,000 deaths per year from stroke, heart attack, and other causes.<sup>28</sup> Even a smaller reduction in sodium of just under 10 percent (350 mg per day) could prevent about 1 million strokes and heart attacks, adding more than 1.3 million years to American's lives.<sup>29</sup>

Reductions of as much as a third of sodium content in foods are readily achievable in restaurant environments through sodium substitutes (i.e., potassium salt)<sup>30</sup> and by making other adjustments to recipes, like using fresh instead of canned ingredients, or by substituting herbs and spices to enhance flavor.<sup>31</sup>



U.S. restaurants also have room to reduce sodium without hurting business, as the city of Philadelphia found when it worked with over 200 Chinese take-out locations to significantly reduce the sodium content of meals (see text box).

## CASE STUDY

### SUCCESSFUL SODIUM REDUCTION: Philadelphia Sodium Reduction Initiative

Reducing sodium in foods does not have to be bad for business. The City of Philadelphia offered sodium-reduction training to chefs from over 200 Chinese take-out restaurants in low-income neighborhoods. After three years, restaurants were able to significantly reduce sodium content by 19-36 percent in their three most popular dishes.<sup>32</sup>



The Philadelphia project shows that long-term reductions in sodium are achievable even for small independent U.S. restaurants. Long-term, sustained policies that promote sodium reduction at larger restaurant chains have even greater potential to produce large-scale, lasting impacts across even wider populations.



## ADDED SUGARS REDUCTION AND HEALTH

Just as excess sodium raises the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, excess added sugars can contribute to weight gain, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, dental cavities, and other chronic diseases.<sup>33, 34</sup>

This is especially true of excess calories from sugary drinks like full-calorie soda, fruit drinks, sports and energy drinks, and sweetened coffee and tea. Consuming added sugars leads to greater total energy intake because people do not generally decrease their consumption of other energy-dense foods to compensate for the excess sugar. Long-term, large, randomized controlled trials, the gold standard for scientific research, have demonstrated that daily consumption of sugary drinks increases the risk of weight gain<sup>35</sup> and the risk of type 2 diabetes.<sup>36, 37</sup>



One of the most comprehensive reviews to date of the scientific evidence on added sugars and health risks was provided by the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), which advised the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in creating the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. That committee affirmed the connection between added sugars and disease risk, finding strong evidence that added sugars, especially sugary drinks, are associated with excess body weight and type 2 diabetes, as well as moderate evidence that they are associated with increased risk of heart disease.<sup>38</sup>

Based on that 2015 review, the USDA recommended a specific daily limit for added sugars for the first time in the 2015 Dietary Guidelines, (now re-affirmed in the 2020 Dietary Guidelines). Those guidelines recommend limiting added sugars to less than 10 percent of calories per day starting at age 2. As the Dietary Guidelines explain, “[a] healthy dietary pattern doesn’t have much room for extra added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium.”<sup>39</sup> In 2016, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) applied this advice to set a Daily Value of added sugars on prepackaged foods to no more than 50 grams of added sugars for the standard 2,000-calorie daily diet.<sup>40</sup>

Yet Americans are far from meeting this target. The most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans show that adults and children in every age group (2-60+ years), regularly exceed the daily limit for added sugars.<sup>41</sup> In the United States, sugary drinks are the top sources of added sugars in diets of adults and children aged 1 or older.<sup>42</sup>



**ON AVERAGE,  
AMERICANS CONSUME  
17 TEASPOONS OF  
ADDED SUGAR  
EACH DAY**

**Experts  
recommend  
that added  
sugar intake  
should be  
limited to 12.5  
teaspoons per  
day or less**

The infographic features a central image of a clear glass filled with white sugar cubes, topped with a pink and white striped straw. The background is a solid teal color. Text is overlaid on the background in white and teal. The text on the left states that Americans consume 17 teaspoons of added sugar each day on average. The text on the right states that experts recommend limiting added sugar intake to 12.5 teaspoons per day or less.

American communities could achieve substantial health gains through effective policies to reduce added sugars. Researchers have estimated that the FDA added sugars labeling (the addition of the Added Sugars line to the Nutrition Facts panel) on packaged foods could reduce added sugars consumption by 10 percent and prevent more than 350,000 cases of cardiovascular disease and nearly 600,000 cases of diabetes, saving \$31 billion in healthcare costs.<sup>43</sup>

# HOW NUTRIENT WARNINGS CAN HELP




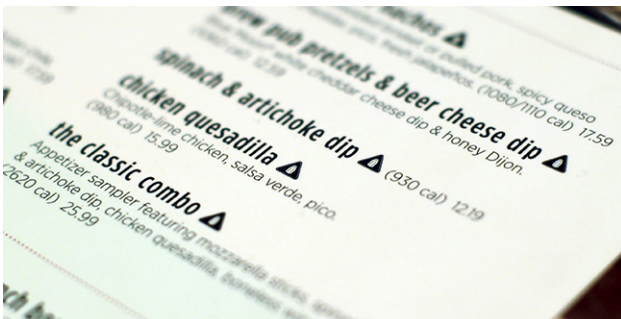
Nutrient warnings are disclosures that appear on menus, menu boards, food labels, or other locations that provide easily interpretable information to consumers about food items that contain excessive amounts of harmful nutrients.

## EXAMPLES OF NUTRIENT WARNINGS IN THE UNITED STATES

### New York City's Sodium Warning Icons on Chain Restaurant Menus



Warning:  indicates that the sodium (salt) content of this item is higher than the total daily recommended limit (2,300 mg). High sodium intake can increase blood pressure and risk of heart disease and stroke.



### Philadelphia's Sodium Warning Icons on Chain Restaurant Menus

## SODIUM WARNING

### ENTRÉES

#### **CAJUN SHRIMP & CHICKEN PASTA (1110 calories)**

##### **SODIUM WARNING**

Sautéed all-natural chicken, shrimp and red bell peppers tossed with fettuccine ribbons in a spicy Cajun Alfredo sauce.

#### **BRUSCHETTA CHICKEN PASTA (860 calories) SODIUM WARNING**

Fettuccine tossed in garlic, basil and Roma tomato marinara. Topped with strips of garlic-marinated all-natural chicken breast. Finished with balsamic glaze and Parmesan shavings.



## INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF NUTRIENT WARNINGS

Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and Mexico have laws requiring similar warnings icons on packaged food for products high in sugar, calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

### Chile's Warning Icons for Packaged Foods High in Sugar, Calories, Saturated Fat, and Sodium



### Israel's Warning Icons for Packaged Foods High in Sugar, Salt and Saturated Fat



### Mexico's Warning Icons for Packaged Foods High in Calories and Sugar



Nutrient warnings are an objective, accessible, and widely supported tool to help individuals identify and avoid foods with excessive amounts of sodium, added sugars, and other nutrients people are recommended to limit in their diets.

Policies that require warnings on foods and beverages that are high in sodium and added sugars could benefit community health by nudging people towards healthier choices and encouraging companies to rethink their recipes, spurring reformulation to cut back on sodium and added sugars in order to prevent products from being required to carry the warnings. Warnings can also help address the misleading effects of marketing practices that misrepresent the healthfulness of foods and normalize overconsumption.

Evidence from randomized controlled trials and real-world studies also suggests that nutrient warnings can increase consumers' understanding of the healthfulness of foods and have the potential to play a role in reducing purchases of foods and drinks high in calories, sodium, and added sugars. (For more information see [Nutrient Warnings: Summary of the Scientific Literature and Policy Recommendations](#))

Communities across the world have begun to experiment with nutrient warnings as a way to push back against the food industry's irresponsible marketing of unhealthy products, with the goal of shifting individual and industry behavior. As of June 2022, calorie and/or nutrient warnings (including for sodium, calories, saturated fat, and sugar) are required on packaged food and beverage labels in five countries (Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Mexico, and Israel) and similar laws have passed but are not yet implemented in at least four additional countries (Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, and Venezuela).<sup>44, 45, 46</sup>

Initial findings indicate that these international policy efforts have been successful in positively influencing individual food choices and manufacturer product formulations.<sup>47, 48, 49, 50, 51</sup> For example, in Chile, where mandatory nutrient warnings were passed as part of their Law of Food Labelling and Advertising, there was a significant reduction in the proportion of unhealthy products offered on the market.<sup>52</sup> Sugar purchased from beverages dropped by 10 percent in Chilean households in the 18 months after Chile adopted "high in [sugar/sodium/saturated fat/calories]" nutrient warnings on food and drink packaging nationwide.<sup>53</sup>

In the United States, two cities, New York and Philadelphia, have adopted warnings on high-sodium items sold in chain restaurants.<sup>54, 55</sup> Most recently, New York City became the first U.S. jurisdiction to pass legislation requiring added sugars warnings on chain restaurant menus. The New York City warnings will appear on prepackaged items containing more than a day's worth of added sugars (50 grams).<sup>56</sup>

There is broad and deep public support for these measures. Polling conducted prior to passage of added sugar warnings in New York City showed that 78% of all New Yorkers, including 85% of New York City residents, supported the warnings.<sup>57</sup>

Support was bipartisan, with 85% of Democrats and 66% Republicans supporting the policy, and those who purchased food or drinks at chain restaurants more frequently had higher support for the policy than less frequent customers.

These findings align with the high levels of support for prior disclosures. For example, 81 percent of adults in a national survey from 2011 supported policies requiring the posting of calorie counts,<sup>58</sup> and a national survey from 2019 found that more than half of consumers report making use of calorie labeling to avoid ordering high-calorie menu items.<sup>59</sup>





# HOW TO DESIGN NUTRIENT WARNINGS

## MAXIMIZING THEIR IMPACT

Warning icons and messages can vary, with many designs proven to be effective in different ways. Studies find that warning icons for items high in nutrients that people consume in excess are effective at reducing the selection of unhealthy items and can result in the selection of healthier choices.<sup>60, 61</sup>

Figure 3  
Examples of nutrient warning icons for added sugars and sodium



An international research team recently reviewed the global evidence on warnings' effectiveness and made several recommendations for front-of-package nutrition labels to have maximum public health impact,<sup>62</sup> specifying that labels should:

- Be highly visible
- Convey a simple and easy-to-understand message(s)
- Limit or avoid numeric information
- Use symbols and colors that leverage automatic associations to help consumers interpret nutrition information quickly and accurately (e.g., stop signs, letter grades, traffic lights)
- Integrate informational and emotional messaging
- Warn or caution consumers (e.g., use words/phrases like excess, high in, avoid, or warning)

In addition to these recommendations, a large body of tobacco research suggests that including symbols and imagery in warning labels can increase the impact of warnings on behavior.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup> Experimental studies confirm that these findings translate to sugar warnings. While several studies have shown that even a simple text-only warning can still out-perform controls with no warning at all, including a combination of text and pictorial elements can help boost the impact of warnings (see Figure 4).<sup>66</sup>



Figure 4  
Examples of text-only, icon-and-text, and graphic-and-text warnings for added sugar

The impact of such warnings can be amplified with a widely recognized symbol or icon, such as a triangle or exclamation point. Such icons may also help to facilitate comprehension for consumers with low English literacy. Studies indicate that the impact of icon warnings may be stronger for parents with low English use as well as for Latino parents than non-Latino parents.<sup>67, 68</sup>



## DESIGNING NUTRIENT WARNINGS WITH ATTENTION TO HEALTH EQUITY

Nutrient warnings policies aim to equip consumers with nutrition information to encourage healthier choices and push companies to improve the healthfulness of their products. Neither of these aims dismantles the structural barriers that reinforce and widen health disparities. Mitigating these disparities will require coordinated and sustained social and economic change to reduce inequitable distribution of constraints on food choice, including physical and financial access to resources to support a healthy life.

While nutrient warnings do not address structural barriers, warning label policies carry important public health benefits and therefore should be designed to maximize inclusive participation in their design and equitable distribution of their benefits. Ensuring that warning labels are desired, understood and utilized across diverse populations can help prevent these policies from exacerbating health disparities.

Efforts to design nutrient warnings should include communities that have been negatively impacted by prior food industry marketing. Predominantly Black and Hispanic communities face higher exposure to fast food, a product of residential segregation rooted in historic policies like redlining, disinvestment, and targeted marketing.<sup>69</sup> These negatively impacted communities should have an opportunity to guide and direct future decisions related to nutrition policy, including the adoption



and design of nutrient warnings. Icon design can also benefit from co-creation strategies that incorporate design feedback from the communities who will be served by the icon.<sup>70</sup>

Policies should also be designed to promote widespread access and use across communities. Existing tools for consumers to gain access to nutrition information on foods (e.g., the Nutrition Facts label) tend to require nutrition literacy and numeracy skills<sup>71</sup> and are less utilized by people with less education and income.<sup>72,73</sup> In contrast, some studies suggest warning labels are at least as accessible for people with lower versus higher levels of education and income.<sup>74,75</sup> Icons such as a stop signs, caution symbols, or exclamation points are accessible across languages and levels of English literacy.<sup>76</sup>

Warning label policies can also consider equity by being designed to ensure they include the communities most unjustly burdened by health disparities. For example, policies that apply to fast food restaurants, which are disproportionately located in under-resourced communities,<sup>77,78</sup> would be more likely to benefit these communities than policies targeting chain grocery stores, which disproportionately fail to serve under-resourced communities.<sup>79,80</sup>

Warning icon policies should also cover food environments that present the greatest harm to communities. This means, in part, working with local community groups to ensure that the policy covers restaurants and retailers that serve the communities most impacted by health disparities within a particular jurisdiction. Policies should also be targeted to ensure that the icon appears in a relevant and accessible way on the food items (i.e., combination or “value” menu items) and via the purchasing practices (e.g., online, drive-thru, and in-person) heavily utilized by communities within the jurisdiction.

# NUTRIENT WARNING POLICIES

## CAMPAIGN PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Effective communication strategies are a foundational part of a successful warning icons campaign. Targeted and persuasive messaging helps to engage stakeholders and share information about your campaign. When planning a campaign for nutrient warnings, consider:

### 1. Center Equity in your Policy Development

- Policies that are co-designed and implemented by the communities they serve can help to ensure that they will have their intended outcome and not have unintended consequences or exacerbate disparities.



### 2. Work with Legal Experts on Policy Design

- A legal expert who understands federal and state preemption and First Amendment law can help design a policy that will withstand legal challenge (*see more in Legal Considerations section below*)

### 3. Know Past initiatives at the State/Local Level

- Understanding the current laws and regulations, as well as those that have been introduced or considered, can help establish what policy gaps exist. Additionally, completing a scan of past advocacy efforts related to nutrient warning policies can help identify effective strategies and potential allies. Obtaining state/local public hearing testimony transcripts on related legislation can also reveal potential allies and opponents and shed light on their positions.

### 4. Know the Level of Industry Influence

- Historically, industry opposition to restaurant warning labels has predominantly come from the National Restaurant Association and the American Beverage Association. It is important to understand which industry groups might oppose your policy and what arguments they use to support their claims. Developing counter messaging and anticipating industry next moves will be essential.



## 5. Know the Political Landscape

- Understand the policy-making process and political make-up of your state/locality. Which decision-makers should be targeted? How will you engage and influence these decision makers? What are their positions on the proposed policy, and do you foresee any opposition? Hiring a lobbying team with local expertise can boost your knowledge and facilitate conversations and technical aspects of your campaign as they relate to the legislative process.

## 6. Consider Timing

- There are many timing considerations to make as you think about how to plan your policy/campaign. There can be unexpected natural disasters/events, political scandals, and national/state/local movements that can either help or hurt your campaign (e.g., COVID). Additionally, understanding the timing of state/local legislative sessions can help your planning for introduction, passage, and implementation of your policy.

## 7. Conduct a Community & Coalition Readiness Assessment

- It is important to understand if a community has the infrastructure necessary to support the work of passing nutrient warnings policies and to determine where they may need support. Understanding the needs of the community and having input from a diverse group of stakeholders are essential to inform an equity centered campaign.
- Here we highlight the work of the Center for Black Health & Equity, where they have worked to create a Community Readiness Assessment and Coalition Readiness Assessment to help think through and determine whether a community and/or state is ready for chain restaurant sodium warning policy interventions:

### GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Check out Center for Black Health & Equity's Community Readiness Assessment and Coalition Readiness Assessment:

[Community Readiness](#)

[Coalition Readiness Assessment](#)

## 8. Build a Broad and Diverse Coalition of Supporters

- Engaging with a diverse set of organizations can help to improve population health and positively impact social change, ultimately helping to alleviate health disparities. CSPI worked with Interfaith Public Health Network (IPHN) to educate, engage, and enlist diverse faith communities to work on the Sweet Truth Act, a policy to require added sugar warnings on restaurant menus policies.

- Here we highlight the work of IPHN where they built a coalition of FBO's who engaged in advocacy for our nutrient warning campaign:

**GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT**  
 Check out Interfaith Public Health Network's **Sign on Letter** in support of The Sweet Truth Campaign

**9. Understand Implementation Challenges**

- Policies can require an extensive amount of work after passage, particularly the implementation and enforcement. Often health departments and other government agencies are responsible for these activities, and meeting with public health officials that lead those departments can ensure the policy can actually be implemented and has their support.

**10. Work with the Media**

- The media have a big influence on policy campaigns at many levels and can help to amplify your messaging. Holding press events and connecting them with public health officials, lawmakers, or spokespeople impacted by the policy are two strategies that can help spread the word about your campaign (*see more in Communications section below*)

**LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Working with a legal expert in policy design can help avoid potential pitfalls that can prevent your policy from being enforceable. Here are a few legal considerations a legal expert may be able to help you research and address:

**Who Can Adopt and Enforce a State/Local Nutrient Warning Policy?**

While the authority to require nutrient warnings on restaurant foods varies by jurisdiction, historically localities have passed menu warnings in one of two ways: through legislation, or through rulemaking at the state/local Health Department. New York City was the first jurisdiction to adopt sodium warnings in 2015 through a regulation issued by the city health department.<sup>81</sup> In 2018, the city of Philadelphia followed by passing a local sodium warning labelling law through the city council.<sup>82</sup> In 2021, New York City was the first to adopt added sugars warnings and also passed a local law through city council.<sup>83</sup> In all cases, the warnings are enforced by the same government agency that performs restaurant food safety inspections.





### **Preemption Affects Some Types of Nutrient Disclosures**

Federal law preempts states and localities from adopting nutrition labeling requirements for food labels or restaurant menus. This prevents, for example, a city from requiring that a disclosure for teaspoons of added sugars appear on the front of food packages. But there are two exceptions to this:

- **Safety Warnings.** Federal law permits states and localities to require warnings “concerning the safety of the food or component of the food.” This exception allowed the cities of New York and Philadelphia to adopt warnings for menu items that contain more than an entire day’s worth of sodium.
- **Preemption Waivers.** Federal law allows states and localities to petition for an exemption from federal preemption for state or local nutrient labeling requirements that are not safety warnings. The city of Philadelphia attempted to use this process by petitioning for milligrams of sodium disclosures on menus in 2011.<sup>84</sup> However, the FDA has yet to respond to the city’s request.

Individual states can also pass laws preempting cities and localities from passing warnings. An expert familiar with your state’s laws can help you determine whether such preemption exists in your state.

### **Nutrient Warnings Must Comply with the First Amendment**

Warnings are a form of “speech,” so cities and states that require warnings should take steps to avoid violating the First Amendment. This can include steps to make the warning factual and uncontroversial, and avoid placing an unnecessary burden on industry, for example by keeping the warnings at a reasonable size.

# MODEL LEGISLATION AND POLICY EXAMPLES

## MODEL NUTRIENT WARNING LEGISLATION

CSPI has developed this Model Legislation Requiring Nutrient Warnings at Chain Restaurants as a guiding strategy to enhance consumers' awareness of the healthfulness of foods. This Model Legislation would require a warning icon to be placed on menu items that exceed the daily recommended values for added sugars/sodium, as well as a warning statement to alert consumers of the link between overconsumption of these nutrients of concern and health outcomes:

[Model Legislation: Sodium and Added Sugar Safety Warnings for Chain Restaurants](#)

## STATE/LOCAL POLICY EXAMPLES

**Sodium Policies that have successfully passed:**

Rule/Local Law: [New York City's Sodium Warning Rule](#)

Guidance: [Understanding NYC's Sodium Warning Rule in Chain Restaurants](#)

Rule/Local Law: [Philadelphia's Sodium Warning Bill](#)

Guidance: [Understanding Philadelphia's Sodium Warning Law: Watch the Salt Look for the Label](#)

**WATCH THE SALT.  
LOOK FOR THE LABEL.**



**Sodium Policies that Have Been Introduced:**

- [New York State Sodium Warning Bill](#)
- [New Jersey's Sodium Warning Bill](#)

**Added Sugars Policies that have successfully passed:**

Rule/Local Law: [New York City's Added Sugars Warning Bill](#)



# FACT SHEETS AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

It is helpful to summarize campaign information into short fact sheets and provide educational resources wherever needed for advocates and legislators. The purpose of these documents should be to convey the basic information about your campaign and articulate your major points with the goal to inform and persuade your audience. See how Public Health Advocates drafted a creative way to inform people about their campaign by using a quiz to highlight the high amount of sodium in chain restaurant foods.

## [The Salty Sweet Truth About Sodium and Added Sugars](#)

This fact sheet helps to define added sugars and sodium and presents evidence on the link between overconsumption of these nutrients and health outcomes. We summarize the unhealthy landscape of the chain restaurant space and present warning icons as a policy solution.

## [Nutrient Warnings: Summary of the Scientific Literature and Policy Recommendations](#)

This fact sheet reviews relevant scientific literature on nutrient warnings for a science and policy audience. Overall, evidence from randomized controlled trials and real-world studies suggests that nutrient warnings can increase consumers' understanding of the healthfulness of foods and have the potential to play a role in reducing purchases of foods and drinks high in calories, sodium, and added sugars.

## [Know the Truth About Added Sugars](#)

This fact sheet defines added sugars, details over consumption and its impact on health, highlights relevant statistics in New York city, and presents nutrient warning icons as a policy solution.

## [The Salty Truth About Sodium: Why New York Needs Menu Warnings](#)

This fact sheet defines sodium, details overconsumption and its impact on health, highlights relevant statistics in New York State, and presents nutrient warning icons as a policy solution.

## [Sweet Excess: Largest Restaurant Chains Consistently Serve Up Drinks with More than a Day's Worth of Added Sugars](#)

This report, conducted in March 2021, found that the largest chains consistently serve up drinks with more than a day's worth of added sugars, indicating a strong need for added sugars icons to inform consumers and encourage chains to reduce the added sugars sold in drinks.

# COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

Below are some types of communications that can be used to support nutrient warnings, taken from CSPI's campaign in support of New York City's Sweet Truth Act, a bill to require added sugar warnings on restaurant menus.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

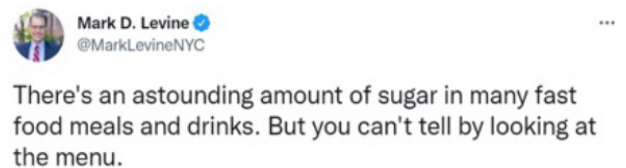
Social Media provides a global platform for influencing decision makers and the public. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube offer platforms to bring attention to your issue, stimulate dialogue, and can be noticed by the media.

Example tweets from CSPI and our partners supporting added sugars warnings in New York City:



**CSPI** @CSPI

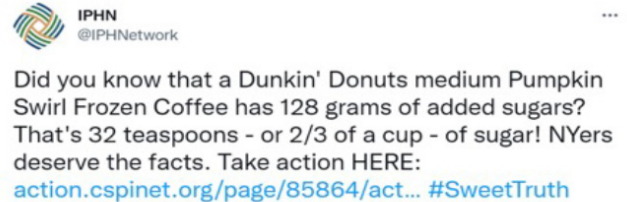
The @NYCCouncil health committee just voted to advance the #SweetTruth Act—soon to be the first US policy to require warnings on foods & drinks high in added sugars. Thank you @MarkLevineNYC and @KeithPowersNYC for driving this effort. On to a full council vote tomorrow! 🌞



**Mark D. Levine** @MarkLevineNYC

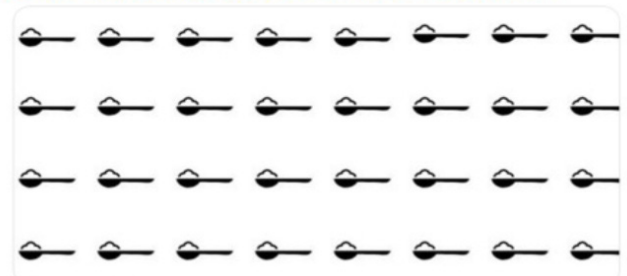
There's an astounding amount of sugar in many fast food meals and drinks. But you can't tell by looking at the menu.

Great rally today in support of our @NYCCouncil bill to fix that. Would require high added sugar warning icons on chain restaurant menus. [newyork.cbslocal.com/2021/10/28/sug...](http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2021/10/28/sug...)



**IPHN** @IPHNetwork

Did you know that a Dunkin' Donuts medium Pumpkin Swirl Frozen Coffee has 128 grams of added sugars? That's 32 teaspoons - or 2/3 of a cup - of sugar! NYers deserve the facts. Take action [HERE: action.cspinet.org/page/85864/act...](http://HERE: action.cspinet.org/page/85864/act...) #SweetTruth



**Keith Powers** @KeithPowersNYC

I'm with @MarkLevineNYC at City Hall today advocating for healthy consumer protections at fast food restaurants. #TheSweetTruth





## COMMUNITY STORIES/STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a tool that can be used to help communities highlight the need for change and helps advocates connect with listeners on a deep level, generating compassion and empathy. It is an important part of community-led systems change that facilitates collaboration across differences. Here we highlight a story told by one of the advocates for added sugars warnings, a practicing pediatrician in New York City:

**“I am not an alarmist, but what I have witnessed this past year is quite concerning...we are diagnosing approximately 1-3 children/teens with Type 2 Diabetes weekly, especially these last several months. During my last on call, a 10-year-old male and 13-year-old female were diagnosed during their routine exams, which had been delayed by 18 months, due to the pandemic...”**

**– Dr. Ileana Vargas**

*Pediatric Endocrinologist at Columbia University Medical Center*

## BLOG POSTS

Blog posts are an opportunity to discuss the motivation behind a policy and are less technical, short, and focus on the big takeaways for readers. See how the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy detailed the passage of Added Sugars warning legislation in New York City.

### GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Check out Laurie M. Tisch’s **Blog Post** announcing passage of the Sweet Truth Act



## SAMPLE YOUTH TRAINING CURRICULUM

Providing education about policies that impact communities can help aid in learning and collaboration, as well as equip communities with the information they need to approach lawmakers and community leaders with the tools to create the change they want to see in their communities. See how Teens for Food Justice created a workshop intensive program for teens that investigated the food and health justice issues related to the prevalence of high added-sugar products in our local food systems.

### GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Check out Teens for Food Justice's [Educational Curriculum](#) for students

## PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

Providing testimony at public hearings is a powerful advocacy strategy and informs city leaders and legislators about the needs of the communities they serve. Testimony is entered into the public record and can influence legislative decision-making.

CSPI's testimony to the New York City Council's Health Committee supporting strengthening the Sweet Truth Act:

- [New York City Committee on Health & Subcommittee on COVID Recovery and Resiliency](#)

## OPPOSITE EDITORIALS (OP-ED'S)

Op-eds are an opinion pieces that provide advocates an opportunity to draw attention to an issue/policy and influence the conversation of the public, including decision makers. Op-ed's can be placed in many different news outlets, including those read by politicians and their staff, researchers, and other advocacy groups.

Op-eds supporting the Sweet Truth Act:

- [Let's Give New Yorkers Sweet Transparency — Lives are At Risk](#)
- [The Sweet Truth About Fast Food Restaurants](#)

Op-Ed

### Op-Ed | The sweet truth about fast food restaurants

By Dr. Ileana Vargas and Dr. Sara Abiola



## POLLING

Polls are helpful tools for gauging public opinions on policies and can help to inform legislators, community leaders, and policy makers.

Results from a New York State Poll Assessing Support for Sugar Warnings:

- [New Yorkers Support Added Sugar Warnings on Chain Restaurant Menus](#)

## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Check out Public Health Advocates' Sodium Warning Icon Community Campaign  
FAST FOOD SODIUM QUIZ IN [ENGLISH](#) AND IN [SPANISH](#)

## REPORTS

Reports provide foundational research and lay out a basic analysis for why specific policy recommendations should be adopted. These reports can be used later to produce shorter fact sheets or added to media pieces to support the campaign.

CSPI's report on added sugars in fountain drinks at chain restaurants:

- [Sweet Excess Largest Restaurant Chains Consistently Serve Up Drinks with More than a Day's Worth of Added Sugars: A Restaurant Menu Survey](#)

## ACTION ALERTS

An action alert is a grassroots tool that can target legislators and decision makers and help mobilize advocates and the public to get involved with your campaign. They can be easily distributed across social media platforms, listservs, partner networks, and through email. Action alerts can be tailored for different phases of the campaign and collect data on your supporters that can be used to keep them connected throughout the policy process.

Action alert urging support for the Sweet Truth Act:

- [Tell your city councilmember to support the Sweet Truth Act today](#)

## PRESS RELEASES

Once a policy passes, a press release can be distributed to the press and across various networks to notify the public of your success.

Press release by CSPI following passage of the Sweet Truth Act:

- [New York City Passes the Sweet Truth Act](#)

## HOLD AN EVENT

Holding events (rallies, pressers, etc.) can help to build support for movements and influence decision makers. They can help to bring community members, legislators, and advocates together to unite on a particular issue, and draw media coverage. Below are pictures of a City Hall rally held in New York City that brought together legislators, community groups, youth, and advocates to highlight the need for passage of added sugars warnings on chain restaurants.



## MAKING A VIDEO

Videos are an excellent way to convey messaging about your policy campaign in a format that is captivating and easy to understand. Videos can also be shared widely and easily across Social Media outlets, making them a versatile campaign tool. Here is an example from our Added Sugars warnings campaign where we engaged with consumers to show how much added sugars are in soda:

### [The Happiness Stand](#)





# ABOUT CSPI

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) envisions a healthy population with reduced impact and burden of preventable diseases and an equitable food system that makes healthy, sustainable food accessible to all. CSPI values independence, scientific rigor, and transparency.

If you have any general questions related to this toolkit or nutrient warnings, please contact DeAnna Nara at [dnara@cspinet.org](mailto:dnara@cspinet.org).

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**WARNING:**  
HIGH IN  
ADDED SUGAR



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