No effect on energy purchased when calorie labels introduced to worksite cafeteria menus

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Conclusions

The addition of calorie labels to worksite cafeteria menus had no effect on energy purchased or offered

- No evidence was found to suggest a change in customer purchasing patterns following the introduction of calorie labels
- Menu offerings showed no evidence of a change after introduction
- By food category analysis showed no clear evidence of changes within specific food categories
- Analysis of retail items suggested no change in sales of higher or lower calorie options

Background

Calorie labelling has been suggested as one possible tool to help people better understand the food they consume and make healthier choices. Randomised controlled trials have shown no evidence of calorie labelling changing the calorie content of selected food items (1,2). On 6 April, legislation went into effect in England and Wales requiring calorie labels to be applied to food items on menus of restaurants, cafes, and takeaways of a certain size (3).

Methods

Sales data and calorie content information from individual products was obtained from 142 worksite cafeterias from January 2022 to May 2022. This period covers a 3-month period before and 6-week period after the effective date of the new law. Interrupted-time-series (ITS) analysis was used to evaluate the impact of the introduction of calorie labels on daily energy (kcal) purchased per transaction. No calorie information was available for retail products (i.e. packaged products such as soft drinks and retail snacks), so they were not included in primary analysis. Secondary analyses was run analysing any change in quantity sales of retail items and on effects by food category.

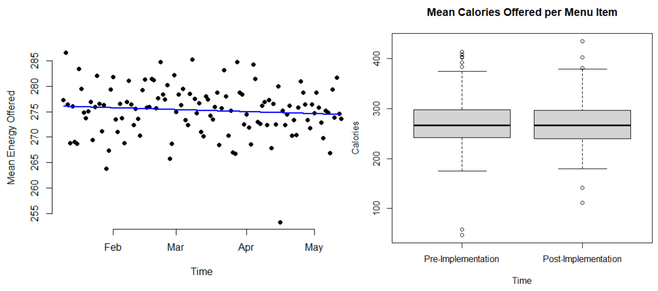


Figure visually representing the mean energy of items selected for worksite cafeteria menus. The figure on the left represents the offerings over time, and the figure on the right shows the boxplot and visual representation of the t-test done in analysis

Department of Health & Social Care

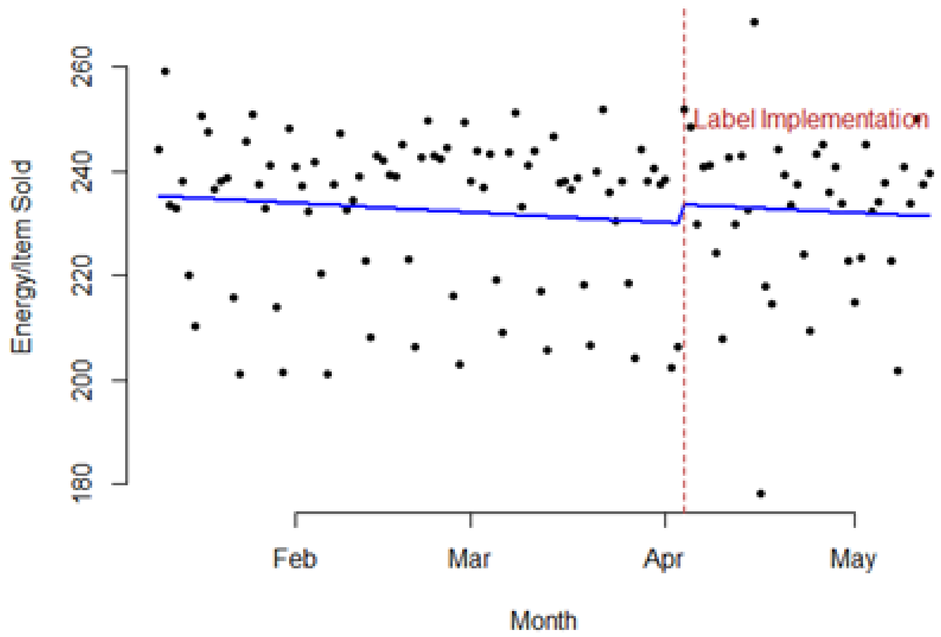
Guidance

Calorie labelling in the out of home sector: implementation guidance

Published 17 September 2021

Website heading for UK government guidance on implementation of calorie labels

Mean energy per product sold during the period three months before and six weeks after calorie labels were implemented



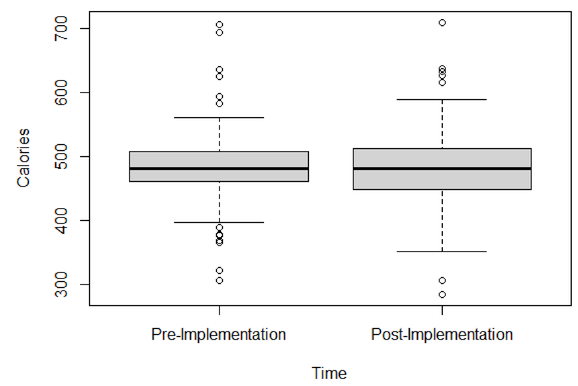
Results

After six weeks of implementation of calorie labels on menus in worksite cafeterias, we found no evidence labelling had an impact on the number of calories purchased per item (4.02 energy (kcal) per product increase, 95%CI: -2.67, 10.71). Analyses by food group did not reveal any clear evidence of changes by food type. Some change was seen for Fruits and Vegetables (+7 calories per item, p=0.038) and Jacket Potatoes (+4.58 calories per item, p=0.049), however, due to multiple comparisons these findings should be interpreted with caution and were not in the expected direction.

Six weeks following the introduction of calorie labels to menus, there was no indication that menu options offered were reformulated in correlation with calorie label introduction (p=0.876).

There was no indication of a change in retail sales (p=0.308) or in drink sales, either for low-calorie drinks (i.e. "diet", "sugar free", etc.) (p=0.196) or those not identified as low-calorie (i.e. all other drinks) (p=0.672).

Mean calories offered for meals



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