

Counting calories:

UK implements law mandating menu labels



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Returning to the school this fall, Antonio Reis ('25) said he noticed new calorie labels on various cafeteria items, namely the yogurt pots.

The U.K. enforced a new law requiring food businesses that employ over 250 staff members to label calories on their menus April 6. A central aspect of implementing calorie labels is to combat obesity by helping individuals make healthier choices, according to GOV.UK.

Catering Manager Christine Kent said as a result of the law, their nutrition label system now automatically prints the number of calories and the ingredients on each item. However, Kent said because the majority of the school's clientele is under the age of 18, the cafeteria is not legally required to display calorie labels.

When the law was first enacted in April, all food items in the cafeteria were labeled. But shortly thereafter, Kent said the catering staff received feedback that students were not happy with the new calorie information, and catering

decided to remove the labels where possible.

"Very quickly we got a lot of comments from particularly some of the high school teachers saying, 'People in my class come and say they're feeling anxious about their eating,'" Kent said. "So the decision was made that we would not display the calories on the menus for the hot food."

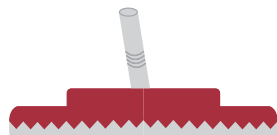
Nonetheless, Kent said the catering staff stores a calorie breakdown of every menu they prepare so that if a community member has a question about the nutritional value of a food item, they are able to receive an answer.

Relationship with food

Lucy Ilyas ('26) said she has also noticed the enactment of the law at restaurants and that viewing the number of calories in each item has influenced her meal choices.

"It's definitely impacted how much I order because you don't really realize how many calories items at restaurants have," Ilyas said. "Shoving those calories in my face, I just feel like it makes me need to worry about gaining weight."

Alternatively, Andrew Okpoyo ('23) said he has always



utilized calorie counts and nutrition labels on packaged food to plan meals, even before the law came into effect.

"That plays a big factor in what I eat because I just want to be as healthy as possible," Okpoyo said. "If I'm stuck between two things, I'll just choose the one which has less calories."

Nonetheless, Reis said while calorie labels can be informative for consumers, one can quickly spiral into unhealthy eating habits. He said he worries about the potential negative effects of calorie labels on menus, particularly for adolescents.

"Looking at calories is always difficult because you've got to find the line," Reis said. "It can be a useful tool, but when it becomes an obsession – and it's difficult to tell when that happens – there'll be a point where you'll realize it is dominating your life. And that's when it can be really harmful."

Impacts of law

The prevalence of adolescents age 5-19 who are overweight or obese has risen from 4% in 1975 to over 18% in 2016, according to

the World Health Organization.

Ilyas said while the aim of the law is to spur healthier eating habits among the population and tackle the growing trend of surplus weight gain, she worries calorie labels on menus will be detrimental to people struggling with their body image.

On the other hand, Okpoyo said he reads calorie labels in order to gain muscle. He said having access to the nutritional information allows him to fuel his body appropriately based on the exercise he will be doing each day.

"If it was earlier in the day, I'd have more calories but as it gets later, then I have less calories," Okpoyo said. "It matches in with my athletics and my sports, or if I'm going to the gym, calories help me recover."

In addition, Porter said displaying calories could be advantageous for people who need to be aware of what they consume due to conditions such as diabetes. However, she said she is concerned about how others' relationship with food – including her own – will worsen.

"Some people have to



Nutrition Facts

Data collected from an online survey conducted by The Standard Oct. 20-26.

*Percent values are based on 129 student and faculty responses.

Question / Statement	% Value*
Have you noticed an increase in calorie labelling on menus?	57.4% Yes
Do you choose your meal more carefully when there are calorie labels?	58.1% Yes
I look at the calorie labels on menus and food packaging to eat healthier.	56.6% Agree
I do not look at the calorie labels on menus and food packaging.	30.2% Agree
Food businesses should be legally required to include calorie labels on menus.	54.3% Agree

Graphics by Eden Leavey and Gideon Putnam



watch what they eat for medical reasons and I can see how that's really beneficial," Porter said. "But I could see the negative impact of this, like for me, the negative mind game that it plays on me."

Legalizing calorie labels

Regarding the necessity of the law, Reis said it is unjust to enforce calorie labels on menus as a legal requirement. He said if a restaurant's brand is specifically related to a lack of presence of calorie labels, such as a comfort food diner that focuses on flavor or a salad bar with an emphasis on health and nutrition, it should be allowed to make that choice.

Porter said an alternative option to the law could be producing two sets of menus, one with calorie counts and one without. She said this would allow customers to select whether or not to see the calorie counts, allowing them to make the healthiest choice for their physical and mental health.

Meanwhile, Okpoyo said he would like to see more nutritional information on menus

as he finds knowing the ingredients and macronutrient distribution ranges of items important for making healthy decisions.

"I'm looking at macronutrients the most, so like the proteins, the saturates, the sugars," Okpoyo said. "At the end of the day calories have a bad rap, but for the most part, it's energy."

Ultimately, Ilyas said displaying calorie labels will impact everyone differently and the government will not be able to effectively evaluate the widespread impact until more time has passed.

"There are so many things telling you to lose weight or to look like this and look like that, and if every time you go out to eat and you see those calories, it's probably not the best thing for people's self-image and self-esteem," Ilyas said. "However, you have to acknowledge the amount of people that this law will help. It is a mixed bag and we'll have to see how it plays out over the next months because it hasn't been enacted for very long."

“Looking at calories is always difficult because you've got to find the line.”

— Antonio Reis ('25)

