

HSC Nutritional Standards: calories on menus

Calorie labelling helps consumers to make informed choices when eating away from home and also helps caterers to provide lower calorie options.

Calories are a measure of the amount of energy in food. Knowing how many calories are in food can help consumers to balance energy eaten with energy used, which is the key to a healthy weight. As a guide, the average man needs around 2,500 calories a day to maintain a healthy body weight and the average woman needs around 2,000 calories a day.

When displaying calorie information, it is recommended that these four principles of calorie labelling are followed:

- calorie information is displayed clearly and prominently at the point of choice
- calorie information is provided for all standardised food and drink items sold or provided. (A standardised food or drink is on sale for at least 30 days a year)
- calorie information is provided per portion/item/meal
- information on average calorie requirements (for example, women need around 2,000 calories per day) is displayed clearly and prominently to help consumers make sense of calorie information provided with food and drink items

Calorie Wise is a free and voluntary scheme delivered by the Food Standards Agency and district councils in Northern Ireland. Calorie Wise helps food businesses to put calories on their menus according to the four principles above. Any catering business can join the scheme, whether it's a restaurant, takeaway, café, coffee shop, pub, sandwich shop or staff canteen. Businesses can apply for either the Gold or Silver Calorie Wise Award. The only difference between the gold and silver award is the requirement to label all or 30 per cent of menu items with calorie information.

Businesses can work out the energy value of their menu items using the [free online tool MenuCal](#). This tool will provide the energy information per portion, in kilojoules (kJ) and kilocalories (kcal).

Taking part in the [Calorie Wise scheme](#) and using MenuCal to calculate energy content of menu items are useful steps towards implementation of the Nutritional Standards.