

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER

THE BETTER FOR YOU MENU LABELING SYSTEM

Purpose

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 35 percent of adults and nearly 18 percent of children in the United States (U.S.) are obese. Obesity and tobacco use among U.S. military healthcare beneficiaries adds over three billion dollars per year to the Department of Defense (DoD) budget in healthcare costs and lost duty days.¹ Failure to meet weight standards is a leading cause of involuntary separation from the military, and obesity in the civilian community may be limiting DoD's ability to recruit qualified personnel.² To help combat obesity, military installations should provide dining environments that encourage good nutrition and offer healthy eating choices. As part of the Healthy Base Initiative (HBI), The Office of Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP), Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in coordination with Service-level Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) representatives is recommending a "Better for You" (BFY) menu labeling system in MWR-operated food outlets to highlight healthier menu choices.

Discussion

Two recent studies by the Hudson Institute, a nonpartisan policy research organization, show how "for profit" companies can succeed both in satisfying increased consumer demand for healthier foods and beverages while improving financial bottom lines. These studies found that, among leading consumer packaged goods companies and restaurant chains, those who have grown their better-for-you/lower-calorie foods and beverages over the past five years have delivered superior sales growth compared to those who were less aggressive in doing so. In short, the research demonstrates that selling lower-calorie, BFY foods and beverages is just good business.³

Better for You Menu Labeling

Better for You menu labeling, where only healthier menu items are highlighted given established criteria, has been developed as an alternative to menu labeling systems that highlight healthy and non-healthy items. MWR dining operators/managers expressed concern regarding potential impact on sales and profitability if non-healthy items are labeled on menus. Through discussions with Service-level MWR representatives, HBI is aware of the for-profit nature of MWR foodservice and wants to minimize the potential for negative financial impact.

Menu items that meet the BFY criteria will be indicated with a physical marker on menu boards and printed menus as well as an icon on digital menu boards.

Also, marketing/promotional materials such as posters, table tents and educational materials have been developed.

Better for You Criteria

The Better for You menu labeling system will highlight healthier menu items if they meet the nutrition criteria presented below. For comparison, nutrition criteria for “Go for Green”, a widely recognized and accepted DoD food labeling system for mission-essential feeding facilities, is presented in the following table.

Item	Better for You	Go-for-Green “Eat Often/Engage at Will”
Center of the Plate (Full Dish)	≤ 500 calories	< 500 calories
Entrée Single Item	<300 calories	<300 calories
Side	≤ 150 calories	<200 calories
Appetizer	≤ 150 calories	N/A
Vegetable	<150 calories	<100 calories
Dessert	≤ 150 calories	< 150 calories
Beverage	≤ 50 calories/8 oz. serving	Water/Calorie-free Flavored Water
Dairy	Skim or 0-1% Fat	Skim or 0-1% Fat
Children’s Full Meal (entrée, side, beverage) (see below)	< 600 calories	N/A
Children’s Side Item	< 200 calories	N/A

As indicated in the preceding table, caloric content is the only criterion for each item in the Better for You system. This does not imply that other nutritional characteristics are unimportant, but lower caloric content infers lower fat and sugar content in foods. The goal of the Better for You labeling is to keep the program simple and easy for the customer, foodservice staff and management to understand. Messaging for the program is also kept simple with the single criterion.

**Children’s Full Meal and Side Item* criteria below are borrowed from the National Restaurant Association’s Kids LiveWell program:

Full Kids' Meals (entrée, side option and beverage):

- 600 calories or less
- ≤ 35% of calories from total fat
- ≤ 10% of calories from saturated fat
- < 0.5 grams trans fat (artificial trans fat only)

≤ 35% of calories from total sugars (added and naturally occurring)
≤ 770 mg of sodium
2 or more food groups (see below)
Full meals must include two sources & sides must include one source of the following:

- Fruit: > ½ cup (includes 100% juice)
- Vegetable: > ½ cup
- Whole grains: contains whole grains
- Lean protein (skinless white meat poultry, fish/seafood, beef, pork, tofu, beans, egg): > 2 ounces meat, 1 egg or egg equivalent, 1 oz nuts/seeds/dry bean/peas (lean as defined by USDA)
- Lower-fat dairy (1% or skim milk and dairy): > ½ cup (while not considered low-fat, 2% milk is allowed if included in the meal and the meal still fits the full meal criteria)

Side Items:

200 calories or less
≤ 35% of calories from total fat
≤ 10% of calories from saturated fat
< 0.5 grams trans fat (artificial trans fat only)
≤ 35% of calories from total sugars (added and naturally occurring)
≤ 250 mg of sodium
1 food group (see above)

Menu Item Nutrition Analysis

Menu items at participating HBI installation MWR food outlets will be analyzed for nutrition content with HBI contract support using the ESHA Food Processor software. This program was selected through a comparison of five products with similar capabilities. The ESHA program was selected based on its functionality, ease-of-use, cost, recommendation by the National Restaurant Association's Director of Nutrition and Healthy Living and acceptance and use by leading private sector restaurant companies. HBI contract support will collect recipe cards from participating MWR dining outlets. Contract support will work closely with MWR food outlet managers/chefs to ensure menu items are input and labeled correctly.

Data Collection

In order to track the success of the Better for You program, data will be required at periodic intervals from participating MWR food outlets. Data will include total BFY items sold and total items sold, and, as available, total BFY items available, total items available, total cost of sales, total sales and number of transactions.

Better for You Program Implementation and Support

The Better for You menu labeling program is estimated to be ready for implementation by last spring 2014.

Contract support from the Culinary Institute of America will be available to assist Participating HBI MWR food outlets to develop healthier menu items, if desired.

Choice architecture, which influences customer's purchasing decisions through subtle changes to the physical environment will also be available, if desired. For example: Research by the Cornell Food and Brand Lab has shown that menu layout and organization affects customer's purchasing habits.

References:

¹ Department of Defense. 2008. Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among U.S. Military Personnel.

² Mission Readiness: Still Too Fat to Fight. <http://www.missionreadiness.org/2012/stilltoofattofight/>

³ The Hudson Institute: Better-For-You-Foods: An Opportunity to Improve Public Health and Increase Food Industry Profits. http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/better_for_you_combinedFINAL.pdf

⁴ National Restaurant Association. <http://www.restaurant.org/Industry-Impact/Food-Healthy-Living/Kids-LiveWell/About>



STOP

Eat Rarely

- Highest in fat, sugar, and/or salt
- Limit frequency and choose smaller portions
- May hinder performance



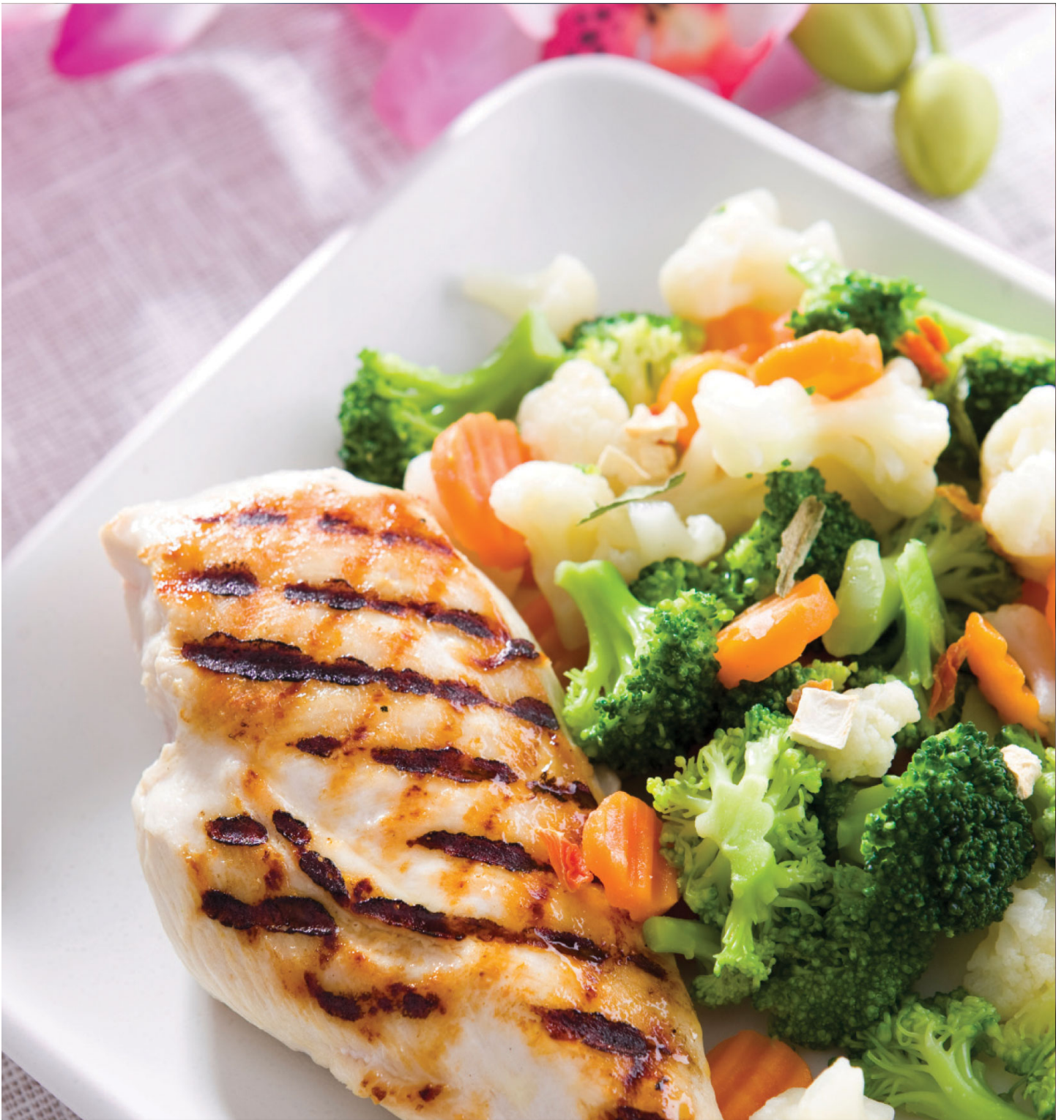


CAUTION

Eat in Moderation

- Higher in sugar, fat, and/or salt
- Choose small portions
- Make less than 1/3 of your plate
- Yellow-labeled choices





GO

Performance Food

- Nutrient-packed
- Great performance-food choices
- Make 1/2 your plate Green-labeled choices





GO

Performance Food

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Eating well to perform

Better for You

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