**Calorie counting will be easier when new rules are followed**

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WASHINGTON — If you wonder how fattening that supersized soft drink is, in about a year you will find out.

Since 1990, food manufacturers have been required to label their products with calorie information. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced Tuesday that many places that sell food will have to list calories on their products as well. A calorie is a unit of energy in food. Too many calories lead to weight gain.

The government is concerned about the great number of overweight Americans. The idea behind the new rule is that if people really knew how many calories were in that slice of pizza or box of popcorn, they would eat more healthy foods.

**Even At Ice Cream Shops**

Included in the new rules are large chain restaurants, amusement parks and movie theaters. Even supermarkets and convenience stores that serve prepared dishes must say how many calories they contain.

The new guidelines will apply to chains with more than 20 locations. That also goes for bakeries and cafeterias, as well as ice cream shops, candy stores and pizza parlors.

If people want additional nutritional information, the new rules say it must be given upon request. The additional information would include things like salt, sugar, fat and cholesterol content.

Alcoholic drinks listed on menus also must be labeled under the FDA rules.

**So Many Details To The Rules**

The new guidelines were required under the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which expanded health care coverage in the United States. They begin on Dec. 1, 2015.

Vending machine operators will also have to label the calories of each candy bar or bag of chips. The vending machine rules take effect a year later, on Dec. 1, 2016.

The new rules were detailed on Tuesday in the Federal Register, which publishes government documents. It took 525 pages to explain all the details.

The rules are intended to help consumers make more informed and healthy nutritional choices.

Americans spend nearly half their food money on food made outside the home. These outside foods account for about one-third of the calories people eat, according to the FDA. Two-thirds of adults and one-third of children are either overweight or obese. Many people simply do not know how many calories these foods contain. Other people think they have fewer calories than they actually do.

**Making Healthier Choices**

Public health experts praised the new labeling rules. They called the rules an important step toward empowering consumers and creating a healthier nation.

“These regulations are an achievement for public health," said Georges Benjamin. He is the executive director of the American Public Health Association. Benjamin also called them "a positive step" toward fighting many diseases tied to being overweight, like diabetes and heart disease.

"Consumers will have the information they need to make healthier, more educated decisions about their food choices when eating outside the home," he said.

Dawn Sweeney is the president and CEO of the National Restaurant Association. She said the new rules will make nutrition information available in 200,000 restaurants nationwide.

“We believe that the Food and Drug Administration has positively addressed the areas of greatest concern with the proposed regulations," Sweeney wrote.

**The Rules Got Tougher**

In 1990, the federal Nutrition Labeling and Education Act required nutrition information be provided on most foods. However, restaurants, vending machines and other prepared foods were exempt from the law. In the years since, state and local governments created their own labeling requirements. But those were not consistent. The new FDA rules will help avoid situations in which a chain restaurant has to meet different labeling requirements in different states, the FDA wrote.

But some observers felt the new measures were tougher than expected. Peter J. Larkin is the president and CEO of the National Grocers Association (NGA).

Larkin wrote the association is "disappointed" that the FDA’s rules include grocery stories. He said it would be extremely expensive for grocery store owners to follow. He said the NGA will work with Congress on a law to exempt grocery stores.

The FDA estimates the vending machine rules will cost operators $37.9 million over the next 20 years.

Carla Balakgie is the president of the National Automatic Merchandising Association. She said the rules were acceptable to the group’s 1,500 member companies.

She said she appreciates the vending machine industry is being given a longer period to post the signs.