

## **Re: “Eating up calories and propaganda”**

Lori Dorfman, Kensington

Subway is surely enjoying a “halo effect” if customers there guess that the meal they’re eating is, on average, about 200 calories less than what McDonald’s customers guess they’re eating. But what’s lost in this little tidbit is the fact that the average meal the researchers found customers eating in both restaurants was 911 calories — nearly half of a daily allotment. This is more evidence that consumers need menu labels that state calories and basic nutrition content before they place their order.

### **Original article**

“Eating Up Calories and Propaganda”

Alex Mindlin

(New York Times, September 3, 2007, page C3)

By any measure, Americans are increasingly interested in eating healthily, yet obesity rates are rising, too. A recent paper in *The Journal of Consumer Research* tries to explain this phenomenon by describing a “health halo” at fast-food restaurants that market themselves as healthy, such as Subway. Consumers at such restaurants can underestimate the calories in their food.

In one study, researchers interviewed 518 people who had just finished meals at either McDonald’s or Subway. After recording what the subjects had eaten, the researchers asked them how many calories they believed they had consumed. For a medium-size 911-calorie meal, the Subway diners believed they had eaten 205 fewer calories on average than the McDonald’s diners believed.

In another study, 46 college students were given coupons for either a McDonald’s Big Mac or a Subway 12-inch Italian B.M.T. The B.M.T. sandwich has 300 more calories than the Big Mac, but the Subway diners were less likely than the McDonald’s diners to order a diet soda, more likely to upgrade to a larger drink and more likely to order cookies.