

Provision of calorie and nutrition information by branded out of home businesses in Scotland.

Introduction

The food and drink we buy and consume from the out of home (OOH) environment tends to be less healthy, and accounts for up to around 25% of the calories we consume. Previous research published by Food Standards Scotland (FSS) in 2018 highlighted that many branded out of home businesses did not provide nutrition information on their websites.

This briefing summarises results from a project to explore the provision of nutrition information by branded out of home businesses in 2021, including information provided online and within premises. The project also analysed the reported calorie contents of food and drink items available from these businesses. Data collection took place between May and June 2021.

'Out of Home' refers to:

- Any food or drink bought and eaten away from home, including 'on the go'
- Any takeaway or home delivered food



Key Findings

- Of the 81 branded out of home businesses surveyed, 52 (64%) provided nutritional information online. All of the businesses that provided nutrition information online, provided calorie information, and 92% also provided information on fat, saturated fat, sugars, protein, and salt.
- There were differences in how the information was presented by businesses on their websites, with some providing a separate PDF or by displaying within the online menu.
- There were also differences in how meals were described online, with some displaying information for whole dishes and others by meal component.
- Analysis of calorie information provided by businesses showed considerable variation in the calorie content of main meals. 32% of the main meals analysed were above 1000 kcal, and 30% below 600 kcal.
- Calorie contents of similar dishes was highly variable. For example, the calorie content of burger dishes ranged from 250 kcal to 2577 kcal while the calorie content of salad dishes ranged from 172 kcal to 1376 kcal.
- 'Food challenges' had the highest caloric value of any meals analysed with one containing 5070 kcal.
- 14 businesses also participated in an online survey, of which around half reported that they provided calorie and/or nutrition information for the majority of their menu items.

Methodology

The project primarily focussed on gathering online and publically available nutrition information. Data collection took place between May and June 2021.

Online information was collected from 81 branded out of home businesses currently operating in Scotland, including; pubs, cafes, coffee shops, cinemas, hotels, fast food outlets, bakeries and sandwich shops. The sample may not be representative of all branded out of home businesses in Scotland and additionally does not include any independently run out of home businesses.

Information was collected on the availability of online nutrition information and how this was presented to the consumer. Calorie values and menu item descriptions were also recorded for:

- Starters and small plates
- Main meals
- Side dishes, including chips
- Desserts
- Pizzas
- Milkshakes
- Coffee
- Popcorn

The reported calorie contents for each of these categories were summarised, including the average¹, highest and lowest calorie content.

Businesses were also invited to complete an online survey on the provision of nutrition information within their premises. The survey included 21 questions, including the prominence of nutrition information provided, presence of information on average energy requirements and business motivations for providing this information to customers.



¹ Median values have been presented.

Results

What nutrition information did businesses provide online?

Of the 81 businesses included in the sample, 52 (64%) provided nutrition information online. All of which provided calorie information for their dishes, with 48 (92%) also providing information on fat, saturated fat, sugars, protein, and salt.

Information on the fibre content of dishes was provided by 22 (42%) of the businesses who provided nutrition information online.

Table 1: Type of nutrition information provided online by OOH businesses in Scotland

Type of nutrition information	% of businesses (number of businesses)
No nutrition information provided online	36% (29)
Any nutrition information provided online	64% (52)
<i>Of which:</i>	
Calories (kcal)	100% (52)
Fat (g)	92% (48)
Saturated fat (g)	92% (48)
Total carbohydrates (g)	90% (47)
Total sugars (g)	92% (48)
Protein (g)	92% (48)
Salt (g)	92% (48)
Fibre (g)	42% (22)

How did businesses present nutritional information online?

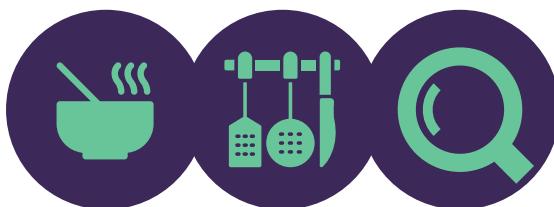
Online nutrition information was presented in different ways by out of home businesses, including within downloadable PDF's or as part of the main menu online. 35 (67%) of the businesses providing nutrition information made it accessible as a downloadable PDF or as an online list, separate to the main menu. Nutrition information could also be accessed on online menus within 20 (38%) of the businesses.

Table 2: Format of nutrition information provided online by OOH businesses in Scotland

Format of online nutrition information	% of businesses (number of businesses) ²
Provided separate to the main menu, as a PDF or list	67% (35)
Available on main online menu	38% (20)

There were differences in how meals and menu items were described online, for example displaying information for whole dishes or components. It could also be unclear what exactly was included in a meal and whether nutrition values were inclusive or exclusive of side dishes.

Nutrition information for pizzas could be presented in different ways, either by whole pizza, by slice, or per portion, and could also be difficult to interpret. For example, one business provided nutrition information for 3 slices of pizza but did not state how many slices were included in a whole pizza; making it difficult for consumers to calculate how many calories they might consume.



² Numbers do not add up to 100% as some businesses made nutrition information accessible either as a PDF/online list and on online menus.

In contrast, other businesses provided very detailed descriptions of meals which could be clearly interpreted. Some businesses also provided an indication of portion size, using descriptions such as 'light', 'small', 'large' or 'extra-large'. A few businesses also provided online nutrition calculators to assist in estimating the total nutritional value of the food and/or drink items selected. Each food and drink selected would be automatically added together to provide the total calorie value in a meal, in addition to showing the calorie value of each individual food and drink item.



What was the calorie content of menu items?

Table 3 shows the wide variation in calorie contents of different menu items provided by out of home businesses. The average³ calorie content of the main meals analysed was 811 kcal and ranged from 172 kcal to 5070 kcal. 32% of the main meals analysed were above 1000 kcal, and 30% below 600 kcal. 'Food challenges' had the highest caloric value of any meals analysed with one containing 5070 kcal.

Descriptions of menu items varied across all businesses and it was often unclear whether nutrition values were inclusive or exclusive of side dishes. This means that some of the calorie ranges presented included both full meals and meal components only – for example, comparing a burger with chips with just the burger.

Table 3: Range of reported calorie contents of menu items provided by OOH businesses in Scotland

Category	Number of items recorded	Average (kcal)	Lowest	Highest
Starters and small plates	296	386	15	1317
Main meal	716	812	172	5070
Pizza	477	970	171	3080
Sides	332	248	11	1334
Desserts	514	392	46	1426
Popcorn	22	366	139	1180
Milkshake	48	357	127	641
Coffee	112	111	5	588

Table 3: Distribution of reported calorie contents of main meals provided by OOH businesses in Scotland

Main meals containing:	% of main meals recorded
Less than 400 kcal	9%
Between 400 – 600 kcal	19%
Between 601 – 800 kcal	21%
Between 801 – 1000 kcal	19%
Between 1001 – 1200 kcal	14%
Between 1201 – 1400 kcal	7%
More than 1400 kcal	11%

³ Median values have been presented.

Further analysis of chips (including sweet potato fries) also highlighted high calorie contents and wide variation. The presence of toppings such as cheese, bacon, sauces, and condiments increased calorie contents further. For example the average calorie content of chips without toppings was 434 kcal per portion, rising to 670 kcal when toppings were included.

Category	Number of items recorded	Average (kcal)	Lowest	Highest
All chips	72	503	129	1334
All chips, no toppings	41	434	129	1128
All chips, toppings	29	670	135	1334
Potato chips, no toppings	34	434	129	1128
Potato chips, toppings	26	721	135	1334
Sweet potato, no toppings	8	397	236	516
Sweet potato, toppings	3	559	503	1310

What nutrition information did businesses provide within their premises?

14 businesses responded to the online questionnaire which requested information on whether they provided nutrition information within their premises.

Businesses who provided nutrition information within their premises

Seven businesses reported that they provided calorie and/or nutrition information for the majority of their menu items within their premises. However, the response from one business only highlighted nutrition information as being available within premises on request and no other formats such as on menu boards or leaflets were selected.

The main reasons businesses gave for providing calorie or other nutrition information were to help customers make informed choices, to meet customer demand, to mirror mandatory labelling requirements being implemented in England or due to encouragement from government or government agencies.

All seven businesses reported that they provided energy information in kilocalories (kcal), and three also provided the information in kilojoules (kJ). Three businesses provided contextual information on average energy requirements for adults to help consumers interpret the calorie content of menu items.

Business reported displaying calorie information in a variety of places within premises, including on shelf labels or tags, on packaging, on menu boards or screens, or other prominent locations, on hand held menus, within leaflets or elsewhere.

Businesses who did not provide nutrition information within their premises

Out of the 7 businesses that **did not** provide nutritional information on the premises;

- 5 provided nutritional information online
- 4 provided nutritional information on request
- 1 provided nutrition information via a mobile phone app
- 1 did not provide nutritional information anywhere



Conclusion

A large proportion of branded out of home businesses provide calorie and/or nutrition information online. The menu descriptions can be unclear, making it difficult to know whether nutrition information is inclusive or exclusive of side dishes. Analysis of menu items highlighted considerable variation in calorie contents, even within similar dishes. The data demonstrates that many popular menu items are high in calories, but the ranges show that lower calorie versions of our favourites meals can also be provided.

This research provides further evidence to support FSS recommendations on an Out of Home strategy for Scotland, specifically:

- Introduction of mandatory calorie labelling at the point of choice.
- Adoption of an agreed voluntary standard for the provision of full nutrition information.
- Reducing calories in the OOH sector.

