

Would you eat that doughnut if you knew you had to walk two miles to burn it off?

October 14 2014, by Donna Parker

A new study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will examine whether adding the amount of walking it takes to burn off the calories in food items will lead consumers to make healthier choices.

Over one-third of adults in the United States are obese, and obesity remains a significant risk factor for many serious health problems. In an effort to combat the [obesity epidemic](#) in the U.S., the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act established the requirement for restaurants with 20 or more locations to post [calorie information](#) on their menu boards. However, research has shown that calorie labeling may not actually lead to decreased [calorie consumption](#).

The Effects of Physical Activity Calorie Expenditure (PACE) Food Labeling study, conducted in conjunction with Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of NC, will test physical activity food labels using three BCBS cafeterias across the state. For example, cafeteria patrons considering a double-cheeseburger would see that it would take about 196 minutes or 5.6 miles of walking to burn the [calories](#) it contains. Quickly comparing this to a hamburger (that contains far fewer calories), they would see that it would require about 78 minutes or about 2.6 miles of walking to burn the calories. This difference might persuade choosing the food item with fewer calories.

The National Institutes of Health funded the \$2,332,953 study. Anthony Viera, MD, MPH, associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and

adjunct associate professor in the Public Health Leadership Program, and Alice Ammerman, DrPH, professor in the Department of Nutrition at UNC's School of Public Health and Director of the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention will lead the project.

"We believe that labels displaying information about physical activity will allow people to better appreciate the trade-offs of high-calorie foods, and thereby influence them to make choices for foods with lower calories," said Viera. "And we think that labeling foods like this may even have the extra benefit of promoting [physical activity](#)."

"This is a great opportunity to learn whether we can improve lifestyle behavior through an innovative approach to policy and environmental change," added Ammerman.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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