

Subway snares first seal of approval from heart group – USATODAY.com

By Bruce Horovitz, USA TODAY

Folks seeking help finding better-for-you restaurant food are about to get it — with Subway out front early.

Friday, the [American Heart Association](#) will announce plans to expand its "Heart-Check" food certification program from grocery stores to restaurant meals. The first chain to earn the new seal: Subway.

The move comes at a time nutritious options have become hot sellers. Up to 42% of Subway's food sales meet the heart group's requirements that limit cholesterol, fat, saturated fat and sodium, says marketing chief Tony Pace.

"What drives me nuts as a marketer is all these other jokers saying they're healthy, and they're not," Pace says. Eight Subway sandwiches, nine salads and four kids meals meet the criteria.

Although the program rolls out with Subway, [AHA](#) expects to expand to other chains, says President Gordon Tomaselli. "Fully one-third of meals are eaten outside of the home," Tomaselli says. "This is not an issue we can ignore."

But one critic questions the program because restaurants pay for AHA's seal. The current Heart-Check food program is linked with 200 companies, from Campbell to ConAgra, that pay fees.

"This money creates a conflict of interest," says [Kelly Brownell](#), director of Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. "What is to keep them from creating lax criteria?"

But Tomaselli says the criteria cannot be purchased. "Criteria must be met by anyone who wants their food certified with the Heart-Check mark," he says. Certification can cost up to \$700,000 annually, he says. "But it's not pay-to-play. The money is used to make sure what we're telling the public is correct."

For Subway, it's a perceptual win of selling healthy food, says consultant Denise Lee Yohn. "If Subway can achieve this perception, that's all that matters."

Brent Jones.