

Nudging Customers to the Healthy Choice in Recreational Settings

Research Summary

This is a summary of the 2014 research article “Choosing healthier foods in recreational sport settings: a mixed methods investigation of the impact of nudging and an economic incentive” by Dana Lee Olstad, Laksiri Goonewardene, Linda McCargar, and Kim Raine

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

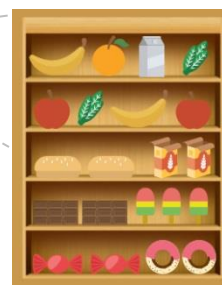
- **Nudging** changes the environment to encourage customers to buy healthier food.
- In this study, nudging increased the sale of healthy items some of the time. Combining nudging and price reductions did not increase healthy food sales more than nudging alone.
- Price reductions and nudging did not hurt overall revenue.
- Nudging could be used alongside other proven strategies to promote healthier choices in recreational settings.

BACKGROUND

- Many recreational facilities offer unhealthy food options, which can make it more difficult for patrons to select healthy items. Managers of recreational facilities are often reluctant to provide healthier food options because they believe that patrons will not buy them.
- Research suggests that people choose foods to buy based on environmental cues, such as menu design, food marketing, food labels, and price.
- Nudging, such as appealing signage and taste testing, might encourage healthy food choices in retail settings.

WHAT IS NUDGING?

- **Nudging** is a strategy that uses subtle environmental cues to encourage customers to make healthier food choices.
- An example of nudging in grocery stores is putting healthier items at eye level and in easy to reach spots on shelving units.



Most healthy items

Least healthy items

STUDY PURPOSE

- This study examined whether nudging could encourage customers to buy healthier items at a publicly-operated outdoor community pool in Alberta.

STUDY METHODS

- This study was conducted at a community swimming pool in Alberta from May to September, 2012.
- A menu was designed for a private concession stand near the pool. 44% of the items on the menu were “choose most often” (healthy), based on the **Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY)**.

- Two nudges and price reductions were tested at the pool concession. Sales of healthy items during each test were compared to sales at the start and end of the study.
1. **Signage (8 days):** Healthy items on the menu were given new names and descriptions to appeal to children. The size of signs advertising healthy items was increased.
 2. **Signage + Taste Testing (8 days):** New signage stayed in place and free samples of healthy food items were offered to customers.
 3. **Signage + Taste Testing + 30% Price Discount (8 days):** Signage and taste testing continued. The prices of healthy items were reduced by 30%.

Healthy Menu with Fun Names + 30% Off

Wacky Wundermelon Slushie \$2.45

Original Name: Watermelon Slushie
+ Original Price: \$3.50

Iced Spring Water \$0.70

Original Name: Water
+ Original Price: \$1.00

Fruit Ninja \$0.70

Original Name: Fresh Fruit
+ Original Price: \$1.00

Does nudging and lower prices encourage patrons to buy healthier foods?

Results were mixed. Nudging encouraged healthier food purchases some of the time. When a price reduction was combined with nudging, healthy food sales did not increase further.

Researchers directly observed patrons' food purchases for 5 hours each day. They found:

- Patrons purchased 30% more healthy items during the signage + taste testing period. Healthy food sales remained the same when a price discount was added.
- When all nudges and price reductions were removed, patrons continued to purchase more healthy items compared to the start of the study.

In contrast, concession sales data showed:

- No significant increase in healthy item sales during any test period compared to the start of the study.
- **Total daily revenue and profit was not affected by nudges or price reductions.**



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nudges encouraged some patrons to buy healthier food. Lowering the price of healthy items did not increase sales of healthy food but may have helped to sustain them.
- Nudging and price reductions **did not** have a negative effect on revenue.
- Recreational facilities could use nudging as one tool to promote healthier eating in combination with other proven strategies.

REFERENCE

Olstad DL, Goonewardene LA, McCargar LJ, Raine KD. Choosing healthier foods in recreational sports settings: a mixed methods investigation of the impact of nudging and an economic incentive. 2014; 11(6): 1-14.

This research summary was produced by the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention as a part of the Food Action in Recreation Environments project and generously supported by a grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation. For more information on policy to promote healthy food environments in recreational facilities, visit www.apccpreproject.com or email APCCP info@abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca.