

Nudging young adults to choose more vegetables in mass eating context: Findings from field studies

Objectives: Although health advantages of eating sufficient amounts of vegetables are recognized among young adults, their consumption of vegetables remains low. Although conventional health education approaches have increased awareness of the issue among public, their effectiveness in changing choice and intake of vegetables has been limited. Nudge (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) offers a promising framework by introducing subtle changes to the immediate food choice environment so that choosing vegetables becomes easier and more natural for consumers at the moment of decision. With the University of Guelph Hospitality Services' support, we are conducting a series of field studies in student cafeterias by introducing nudges designed to increase the choice of vegetables. In this paper, we are reporting three nudge-based strategies recently implemented.

Methodology: Three interventions for nudging were selected after brainstorming with students and hospitality managers. They were implemented in different sections of a centrally located cafeteria on campus. First, a short prompt for adding kale or spinach for only \$1 was placed next to the server receiving orders for smoothie for 9 weeks. The number of customers who added kale or spinach was compared between the implementation weeks and the earlier baseline weeks (Weeks 1-3). A similar prompt was used in the custom-made sandwich section. Lastly, large plates instead of the usual medium-sized plates were placed in prime locations for taking salad bar items, and the display was alternated day by day. Weight of salad bar items sold daily was compared between large versus small plate days. Data came from the University of Guelph Food Services, and the number of students using all the cafeterias on campus daily is about 10,000.

Results: ANOVA analyses showed that sales of the target items were significantly higher on days the nudge was in place versus removed.

Significantly more sandwiches with spinach were sold on days the nudge poster was placed than the baseline ($M=10.91$ vs. 1.23 ; $F(1,58)=8.79$, $p<.01$). Similarly, significantly more smoothies with kale or spinach were sold on days the nudge poster was placed than the baseline ($M=16.5$ vs. 6.9 ; $F(1,58)=21.66$, $p<.01$). However, the weight of salad bar items did not significantly vary depending on the size of plates placed in the salad bar section.

Conclusion: Our findings indicate that simple nudge-based interventions placed at the point of food choice can increase the choice of vegetables among young adults whose eating patterns are less healthy than older people in most advanced countries.

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