

Title of Intervention: Using health messages and lower prices to promote healthy food choices

Intervention Strategies: Environments and Policies, Campaigns and Promotions

Purpose of the Intervention: To improve diet by promoting healthy food choices through use of health messages and lowered prices

Population: Patrons of a restaurant; community-based

Setting: A delicatessen-style restaurant located in a relatively affluent area of a city of about 250,000 people

Partners: Restaurant owners

Intervention Description:

- **Environments and Policies:** The price of targeted healthy items was decreased by approximately 20%-30%. The amount of the price decrease was determined in collaboration with the restaurant owner and manager to mimic a price decrease that would be possible in a typical restaurant setting. Prices of all other items remained stable.
- **Campaigns and Promotions:** Price decreases were advertised on a board at the restaurant entry and on the chalkboard menu of restaurant. The signs were designed to seem as though the restaurant was offering a promotion, and they simply stated, "Price cuts at the Mill. For a limited time only!" The signs then listed the target items with their old and new prices. The health message intervention consisted of rotating two messages. One message was framed so that customers could see a gain while the other message was framed so that customers could see a loss. The gained framed message noted, "Healthy eating increases physical and mental well being. The Mill offers these and the other healthy choices," followed by a list of the target items. The loss framed message stated, "Unhealthy eating decreases physical and mental well being. The Mill offers these and other healthy choices," again followed by the list of target items.

Theory: Matching Model, Health Belief Model

Resources Required:

- Staff/Volunteers: Not mentioned
- Training: Not mentioned
- Technology: Not mentioned
- Space: Not mentioned
- Budget: Not mentioned
- Intervention: Signs
- Evaluation: Computerized cash register system

Evaluation:

- Design: Pre-/post-test
- Methods and Measures:
 - A computerized cash register system recorded all sales and categories were then tallied daily by the restaurant accountant
 - Voluntary patron survey offered to collect demographic information and rankings for factors influencing purchase decisions

Outcomes:

- Short Term Impact: Not measured
- Long Term Impact: Sales of target items rose during each intervention and decreased when each intervention was removed. Sales of certain target items during the price decrease intervention were significantly higher than those during the health message intervention. For all foods, sales were higher during the price decrease intervention than during the health message intervention.

Maintenance: Not mentioned

Lessons Learned: The finding that the price decrease alone was related to higher sales for some (but not all) of the foods may have interesting implications for nutrition policy. Health messages are often included in public health approaches to food choice, but consumers may assume that because a food is described as “healthy” it will not taste good. Thus, any motivation for healthy food purchases inspired by price decreases could be offset by health messages when a consumer decides that the taste of the food will be sacrificed to make it healthy. Restaurateurs who provide healthy choices at reasonable prices may increase their customer base.

Citation(s):

Horgen, K. B. and K. D. Brownell (2002). "Comparison of price change and health message interventions in promoting healthy food choices." *Health Psychol* 21(5): 505-12.