

If We Offer It, Will Children Buy It?

Research Summary

This is a summary of the 2015 research article "If we offer It, will children buy it? Sales of healthy foods mirrored their availability in a community sport setting in Alberta, Canada" by Dana Lee Olstad, Laksiri Goonewardene, Linda McCargar, and Kim Raine

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- Patrons were more likely to buy healthy food when it was available.
- Food sales and revenue were maintained, even when more healthy food was offered.
- Offering a variety of healthy foods in recreational facilities is one way to encourage children to eat healthy. This approach could be paired with other proven strategies, such as traffic light menu labelling.

BACKGROUND

- It is important that children have access to healthy food at home, school, and in the broader community.
- Many recreational facilities sell unhealthy food. These facilities often rely upon the sale of unhealthy food to fund affordable recreation services. For this reason, managers may be reluctant to sell healthier food because they fear patrons will not buy it.



STUDY PURPOSE

- This study assessed whether offering healthier foods and beverages affects customer purchases and concession revenue.

STUDY METHODS

- This study took place in 2012 at an outdoor community pool in Alberta with two onsite concessions.
- **A municipally operated concession** was open throughout the study. Most items offered were pre-packaged foods (e.g. ice cream, candy, granola bars, soda) and few were healthy items (9%).
- **A privately operated (target) concession** opened for a 40 day period (intervention). A larger menu with main dishes, beverages, snacks, and desserts was offered, and 44% of items were healthy items.
- Patrons' food purchases and concession sales were measured during 3 time periods: before the target concession opened, while the target concession was open and healthy items were more available, and after the target concession closed.

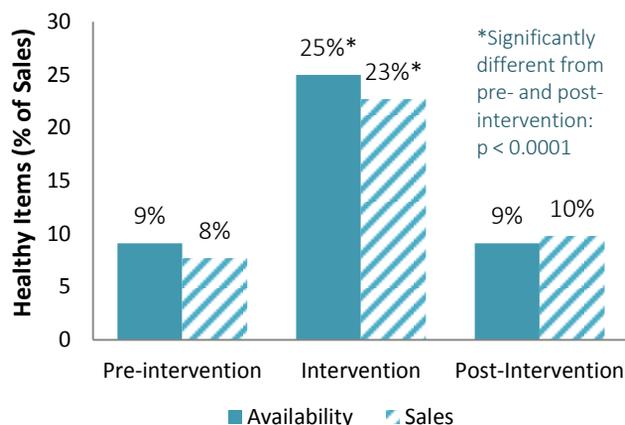
Availability of Healthy Food and Beverages at a Community Pool

	Pre-Intervention (35 days)	Intervention (40 days)	Post-Intervention (6 days)
Pool Concessions Open	Only municipal concession open	Target and municipal concessions open	Only municipal concession open
Healthy Food and Beverages	9%	25%	9%

When the target concession opened the proportion of healthy food and beverages offered at the pool increased from 9% to 25%.

KEY FINDINGS

Healthy Food Sales During Each Study Period



Revenue Per Patron During Each Study Period

	Before Intervention	During Intervention	After Intervention
Municipal Concession	\$1.73	\$0.95	\$2.39
Target Concession	CLOSED	\$1.23	CLOSED
Total	\$1.73*	\$2.19*	\$2.39*

*Change not statistically significant



If we offer healthy food, will people buy it? YES!

In this study, more healthy foods were available when the target concession opened. Availability of healthy foods at the pool went up from 9% to 25%.

When more healthy food was offered:

- **Patrons bought more.** Healthy food sales increased from 8% to 23% of items.
- **Total revenue did not change.** Patrons spent the same amount of money on food.
- **Many patrons still bought unhealthy foods.** Despite offering more healthy foods, 75% of all items available were still unhealthy. Similarly, 77% of sales were from unhealthy foods.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In this study, patrons bought healthier food when it was available. This had no effect on overall revenue.
- These findings suggest that the types of foods offered influence what people buy.
- To encourage children to eat healthy, recreational facilities should offer healthy food. To maximize success, other proven strategies should also be used to guide children towards healthy options (e.g. [traffic light menu labelling](#)).

REFERENCE

Olstad, D. L., Goonewardene, L. A., McCargar, L. J., & Raine, K. D. (2015). If we offer it, will children buy it? Sales of healthy foods mirrored their availability in a community sport, commercial setting in Alberta, Canada. *Childhood Obesity*, 11(2), 156-164.

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.