

# Research Rundown

## Article

### A Systematic Review of School Meal 'Nudge' Interventions to Improve Youth Food Behaviors

## What did this study examine?

This systematic review summarizes the evidence on the effectiveness of school meal **'nudge' interventions** influencing the eating and waste behaviors in students. The goal of this study was to determine the quality of available evidence of school meal nudges on student eating behaviors, such as school meal participation, food selection, consumption, and waste. **The nudges examined in this study included the following serving strategies:**

- 1 **Sliced fruit for convenience**
- 2 **Re-named vegetable dishes to increase appeal**
- 3 **"Featured" plain, white milk to push white over chocolate.**

#### How were nudge interventions examined?

Qualifying studies were reviewed and then classified into three categories:

- **placement or convenience;**
- **marketing or promotion; and**
- **variety or portion sizes of foods.**

Only studies that were scored as strong or moderate quality were included in the final analyses.

#### What participants were assessed?

School children in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Sample sizes for the study ranged from 25 students to ~19,000 students from one to 21 schools. Reported student eligibility for the free and reduced-price lunch program ranged from 10-100%.

## Key Findings:

### Sliced Fruit

Consumption outcomes were **positive** for fruit. Student selection of sliced fruit affirmed the appeal of convenience and how it influenced selection.

### Re-named Vegetables

Participants **significantly increased** their selection of vegetable and salad servings from pre- to post-intervention by re-naming and promoting vegetables.

### Featured White Milk

Selection of white milk **increased** for participants relative to baseline. No significant change in overall milk consumption relative to baseline.

## Put it into practice!

- Appeal to convenience and promote fruit and vegetable consumption by offering sliced and pre-cut produce.
- Get creative! Try re-naming vegetables to fun and inventive names to increase excitement and promote selection and consumption.
  - Examples: Awesome asparagus, groovy green peppers, excellent eggplant, mighty mushrooms, cauli-POWER!
- Reorganize your milk coolers to feature plain white milk in the forefront. Encourage students to choose the plain variety over higher-sugar chocolate varieties.
- Be encouraged to embrace nudge interventions to promote healthy choices for school meals!

### Reference:

Metcalfe, J.J., Ellison, B., Hamdi, N. et al. A systematic review of school meal nudge interventions to improve youth food behaviors. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 17, 77 (2020).  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00983-y>



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