

Pre-Ordering Systems Encourage Healthier Choices in School Lunchrooms

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Abstract

Nearly 1/3 of children between the ages of 6 and 19 are considered obese and unhealthy food choices in school lunchrooms may contribute. To better encourage students to select healthier foods, new research has focused on the behavioral economics of choice and the subtle lunchroom changes that can lead to healthier behaviors and weight. This includes the pre-ordering of lunch. Pre-ordering could pre-empt hunger-based, spontaneous selections and eliminate the sensory cues that lead to less healthy choices. We examine whether having students pre-order their entrée (main dish) improves the nutrition of school lunch selection and consumption. We find that students are 92% more likely to take a healthier entrée, decrease consumption of unhealthy entrées by 7.3%, and decrease consumption of unhealthy snacks by 12.3% when they pre-order. Pre-ordering systems can have a significant impact on the healthful attributes of students' lunches.

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