

Children more likely to use fruit tuck shops when schools ban unhealthy snacks

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Children who attend schools that run fruit tuck shops are much more likely to eat more fruit if they and their friends are also banned from bringing unhealthy snacks on to the school premises, according to research published online ahead of print in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

Researchers at Cardiff University studied the snacking habits of 9-11 year olds attending 43 primary schools in deprived areas of South Wales and South West England which had a variety of policies on bringing food to school: no restrictions, fruit only or no food at all.

Twenty three of the schools were asked to start fruit tuck shops selling a variety of fruit at a fixed price and not to sell sweets and crisps as alternatives. All the schools continued with their current policies on bringing food to school.

Over the year-long study funded by the Food Standards Agency, the tuck shops sold approximately 70,000 pieces of fruit, equivalent to 0.06 pieces of fruit per student per day.

At the end of the year, the children were surveyed on how much fruit and other snacks they had eaten the previous day. They were also asked how much fruit they and their friends were eating regularly at school.

Fruit tuck shops alone had a limited impact on children's fruit consumption at school. Although children in schools with fruit tuck

shops were more likely to say they and their friends ate fruit regularly, the amount of fruit they reported eating the previous day was not significantly more than children at schools without fruit tuck shops.

However, fruit tuck shops had a much greater impact in schools which also had a 'no food' or 'fruit only' policy. Children who attended fruit tuck shop schools where fruit was the only food allowed to be brought in ate 0.37 more portions of fruit per day than those at schools without a fruit tuck shop, while children at schools which banned all types of food ate 0.14 more portions of fruit per day.

Where there were no restrictions on foods allowed to be brought to school, fruit consumption was lower than in other schools, even if the school had a fruit tuck shop.

Professor Laurence Moore, from the Cardiff Institute of Society, Health and Ethics, said: "Our results suggest that children are more willing to use fruit tuck shops and eat fruit as a snack at school if they and their friends are not allowed to take in unhealthy snacks. This highlights the importance of friends' behaviour and of peer modelling, and of the need for schools to put policies in place to back up health interventions."

Source: British Medical Journal

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