

# First foods most: Buffet dish sequences may prompt healthier choices

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When diners belly-up to a buffet, food order matters. When healthy foods are first, eaters are less likely to desire the higher calorie dishes later in the line, says a new Cornell University behavioral study in *PLOS ONE*, Oct 23.

"Each food taken may partly determine what other foods a person selects. In this way, the first food a person selects triggers what they take next," write behavioral economists Professor Brian Wansink and

Andrew Hanks, postdoctoral researcher.

The researchers offered two breakfast buffets to 124 people. In one, diners saw healthy food like fruit, low-fat yogurt and low-fat granola first. At the other buffet, diners saw high-calorie offerings such as cheesy eggs, fried potatoes and bacon first.

"The first three [food](#) items a person encountered in the buffet comprised 66 percent of their total plate, regardless of whether the items were high or low-calorie foods," said Wansink

Specifically, 86 percent of diners took fruit when it was offered first, but only 54 percent took fruit when it was offered last. About 75 percent of diners took cheesy eggs when they were offered first, compared with only 29 percent who dished them up when they were offered last.

While the presentation order of buffet foods prompted diners to take the items they encountered first, researchers saw evidence of a "trigger effect" in the cheesy eggs-first line. "Placing less-healthy foods first all but encourages diners to select the next two calorically dense and highly delicious potatoes and bacon," Hanks said.

"There's an easy take-away here for us...always start at the healthier end of the [buffet](#)," said Wansink, "Two-thirds of your plate will be the good stuff!"

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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