

Changes at the grocery store could turn the burden of shopping with children on its head

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Avoiding power struggles in the grocery store with children begging for sweets, chips and other junk foods – and parents often giving in – could be helped by placing the healthier options at the eye level of children and moving the unhealthy ones out of the way.

A new study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that this dynamic is particularly frustrating for caregivers on limited budgets who are trying to save money and make healthy meals.

The study, part of a project designed to encourage [healthy food](#) purchasing in a low-income neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland, found that many caregivers, when pressed by their children, ended up buying food that they did not intend to buy. To counter this problem, caregivers suggested altering food placement, allowing children to sample healthy food at the [store](#) and offering cooking classes to older children.

The authors believe that the study, published in the October issue of the journal *Appetite*, is the first to examine both the influence of store environment on children and children's influence on grocery shopping.

"Our study suggests that grocery shopping with children often can have negative consequences on the healthfulness of grocery purchases, but has the potential to have a positive influence instead," says Pamela J. Surkan, assistant professor in the Department of International Health at the

Bloomberg School.

This qualitative study, which yielded narratives rather than numeric findings, included 62 adults from southwest Baltimore: 30 who participated in interviews and another 32 who participated in five focus groups. The participants were primarily low-income African American women who were caretakers of at least one child under age 16 and their household's primary food shopper. The study also included several store employees and the storeowner. The [grocery store](#) in the study is a full-service store that bills itself as a low-price supermarket to attract local low-income shoppers. The store is located in a neighborhood that is surrounded by several areas considered to be food deserts, with limited availability of affordable healthy food.

The study participants described often caving in to their children's requests—but not without a fight. They used a variety of strategies to counter their [children's](#) clamoring for unplanned, [unhealthy food](#) choices, including flat-out refusals, redirecting to alternate (and healthier) foods and setting aside the coveted item on the sly.

As for the store environment, study participants remarked on the quantity and advertising of [junk food](#) options, versus healthy options.

One suggestion for an improved [grocery shopping](#) experience was giving samples of healthy [food](#), including fruit. One mother noted that her son wanted to try blueberries, but she didn't want to "buy the whole thing and take it home and it's a waste [if they don't like it]. Let them try."

More information: "Child as change agent. The potential of children to increase healthy food purchasing" *Appetite*, 2014.

www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0195666314003523

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