

# Low cost ways to increase healthy food selection in food pantries

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# THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE OF EATING

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We've collected the newest thinking from 30 consumer behavior researchers into the inaugural issue of the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research.

## I. HUNGER AND SATIETY



**SKIP DINNER IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY:** Spikes in your blood sugar can lead to weight gain. <sup>1</sup>



**DON'T CALL IT HEALTHY:** You overeat food called "healthy" because you think it's less filling. <sup>2</sup>



**MAKE LESS - WASTE LESS:** Low-income families prepare too much food in fear of "running out." <sup>3</sup>



**MIRRORS = MINDFULNESS:** Kitchen mirrors make you dislike unhealthy food. <sup>4</sup>

## II. SHOPPING AND DINING



**HAPPY MEALS CAN BE HEALTHY MEALS:** Brain scans show that small prizes keep you happy when eating less food. <sup>5</sup>



**DISNEY HELPS DIETS:** When juice and fruit came with meals, Disney World goers consumed 11-24% more of them. <sup>6</sup>



**READ CAREFULLY:** Per-serving calorie labels can lead to mindless overeating. <sup>7</sup>



**SLICE SMALLER:** Smaller portions (and bigger tables) lead to smaller meals. <sup>8</sup>



**FOOD PANTRY SOLUTIONS:** Behavioral economics in food pantries lead to healthier shopping. <sup>9</sup>

## III. MINDLESSLY EATING BETTER



**USE SMALL PLATES:** You serve 20-25% less when using small plates - but only if a researcher is not watching! <sup>10</sup>



**THE LESS FANCY THE PLATE,** the Less You'll Eat. We may eat the least off paper plates. <sup>11</sup>



**FORKS OVER SPOONS:** Forks (versus spoons) make you overestimate calories. <sup>12</sup>



**AVOID NEGATIVE MESSAGES:** Telling dieters "Don't eat cookies" can double how much they eat. Use 2-sided messages instead. <sup>13</sup>

## IV. THE FUTURE OF FOOD RESEARCH

FROM FRINGE TO FOCUS:

The Behavioral Science of Eating: Encouraging Boundary Research that has Impact <sup>14</sup>

Boundary Research: Tools and Rules to Impact Emerging Fields <sup>15</sup>



LEARN MORE AND WATCH THE VIDEOS  
[FOODPSYCHOLOGY.CORNELL.EDU/JACR](http://FOODPSYCHOLOGY.CORNELL.EDU/JACR)



- <sup>1</sup> Gal, JACR 2016
- <sup>2</sup> Suher, Raghunathan & Hoyer, JACR 2016
- <sup>3</sup> Porpino, JACR 2016
- <sup>4</sup> Jami, JACR 2016
- <sup>5</sup> Reimann, MacInnis & Bechara, JACR 2016
- <sup>6</sup> Peters, Beck, Lande, Pan, Cardel, Ayoob & Hill, JACR 2016
- <sup>7</sup> Elshiewy, Jahn & Boztug, JACR 2016
- <sup>8</sup> Davis, Payne & Bui, JACR 2016
- <sup>9</sup> Wilson, JACR 2016
- <sup>10</sup> Holden, Zlatevska & Dubelaar, JACR 2016
- <sup>11</sup> Williamson, Block & Keller, JACR 2016
- <sup>12</sup> Szocs & Biswas, JACR 2016
- <sup>13</sup> Pham, Mandel & Morales, JACR 2016
- <sup>14</sup> Van Ittersum & Wansink, JACR 2016
- <sup>15</sup> Wansink & van Ittersum, JCB 2016

Credit: Brian Wansink

Can adjustments in the presentation of food make a difference in the choices, especially among people living in poverty? Are clients at food pantries likely to make the healthiest food choices? New research published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* suggests that food pantry clients deal with a number of factors that can lead to a less healthy choice and that simple adjustments in the pantry set-up may help increase healthy choices.

The study's researcher, Norbert Wilson, professor at Auburn University in Alabama, spent over a year visiting food pantries in Alabama and New York. He developed the paper based on marketing research and conversations and observations in food pantries that support the findings of this review study.

Despite the best efforts of food pantries, they offer a variety of foods which range in healthiness. Clients at pantries make food decisions based on a number of factors. That decision process is influenced by ways that the clients cope with their limited resources. Further, food pantries may inadvertently place foods in a manner that encourages the selection of unhealthy products: such as placing whole wheat pasta at the bottom of the display or sugar-sweetened drinks at the beginning of the choice set. These unintentional designs can affect all shoppers, regardless of resources, but the findings of this paper argue that people in poverty are less likely to make the healthiest choices in the setting because of consumer vulnerability.

In this descriptive study, the author suggests a series of easy, low cost

modifications in food pantries that can nudge clients to make [healthier choices](#). "By raising the profile of the healthier products," says Wilson, "clients may select these products over less healthy products." He continues, "Pantry organizers can help clients even more by making the healthy choice the easy choice."

This article is published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* entitled "The Behavioral Science of Eating." This issue has been edited by Brian Wansink of Cornell University and Koert van Ittersum of the University of Groningen.

**More information:** Gal, David (2016). Wilson, Norbert Lance Weston (2016). When the cupboards are bare: Nudging food pantry clients to healthier foods. *The Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1(1). *The Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1.

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