

## When apples are the default side-dish, children still choose fries

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There has been a lot of enthusiasm for nudging individuals to eat better without restricting choice by making healthy foods more visible, attractive, and convenient. One such effort is for restaurants to serve meals with a default healthy side, such as sliced apples instead of fries, while still allowing the customer to opt out of the healthy side in favor of their preferred side dish. While this strategy has proven to work well with adults in certain settings, researchers Brian Wansink, PhD, and David Just from the Cornell Food and Brand Lab tested out this strategy with young children to see if they would opt out of the healthy option.

"We guessed that children would opt out of a healthier default when much-loved fries were an option," explains David Just. "We were surprised that this was the case even for a relatively attractive healthy option like [apple](#) slices."

The new study findings, published in *BMC Research Notes*, examined whether children would select apples over French fries when the apples were presented as the default option. The researchers bought take-out meal chicken nuggets from a [fast food restaurant](#) for 15 children aged 6-8.. Half of the children were given fries with their meal and told they could exchange them for apples. The other half were given apples and told they could exchange them for fries. The study was repeated the following day and again the following week with the default switched. Even when the default side was apples, 86.7% opted to swap for fries.

The researchers conclude that strongly preferred foods, like fries at fast

food restaurants or red meat at buffets, are so standard that it can be difficult to get people- especially children- to opt for healthier options, even if the healthy option is the default. "A more realistic solution would be to offer a smaller portion of [fries](#) with apples," explains Brian Wansink, author of *Slim by Design Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*, "that way, children aren't forfeiting their favorite food; they are just eating less of it."

**More information:** Brian Wansink et al, The limits of defaults: why french fries trump apple slices, *BMC Research Notes* (2016). [DOI: 10.1186/s13104-016-2061-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-016-2061-z)

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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