

Nudging health in food pantries

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FOOD PANTRIES CAN ENCOURAGE HEALTHY SELECTION THROUGH PRODUCT DISPLAYS!



Credit: Daniel Miller

Grocery stores and cafeterias successfully nudge selection of target foods, but can this same strategy be used to encourage food pantry clients to select target healthful foods? In a new study published in the *Journal of Public Health*, Auburn University and Cornell University researchers found that product placement and packaging had a significant impact on what clients selected in a New York State food pantry. "Food pantries offer a unique opportunity to nudge those most at risk of hunger to select more nutrient-dense foods," explains lead author

Norbert Wilson, PhD, Auburn University, "introducing easy low-cost target marketing strategies is a way to do this without taking away choice."

The researchers observed a total of 443 clients visiting the pantry over 4 days. Protein bars were included in the dessert section along with cakes, brownies, pies and pastries. In this section, the bars were the most nutrient-rich foods so the researchers made two small changes to nudge selection. First, they placed the bars at the start of the dessert line so that clients would see them first. This increased bar selection by about 46%. Second, they kept the bars in their original packaging instead of repacking the individually wrapped bars in clear plastic wrap, which increased selection by about 59%. Each change alone increased selection of the bars and when the protein bars were placed first in the dessert line and kept in original packaging, they were even more popular!

"While [food](#) pantry organizers receive a mix of products, some more healthy than others, this study shows that they can help nudge clients to select those foods that are on the healthier side by making them more convenient - placing them first in line—and appealing—keeping them in the original packaging," concludes coauthor Brian Wansink, PhD, Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and author of *Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*.

The study was conducted by Norbert Wilson, PhD, of Auburn University and David Just, PhD, Jeffery, PhD candidate Swigert, and Brian Wansink, PhD, of Cornell University Food and Brand Lab. This work was supported by the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative Competitive Program of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), [grant number 2014-67024-21849].

More information: Norbert L.W. Wilson et al, Food pantry selection solutions: a randomized controlled trial in client-choice food pantries to

nudge clients to targeted foods, *Journal of Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdw043](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdw043)

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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