

Healthy rewards points can promote healthy foods in restaurants

October 3 2016

From fast food chains to coffee shops, marketers use various promotional strategies to nudge selection of featured foods. Price discounts, rewards cards, and coupons are some common methods. A new Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and Food and Brand Lab study finds that the best way to get customers to make healthy choices is to offer rewards points that can be redeemed when making future healthy purchases.

In a series of lab studies, 178 undergraduate students were asked to indicate whether they would be more likely to buy healthy foods when given a discount at the time of purchase or when given rewards points to use towards healthy items in the future. These studies showed that rewards points are most likely to result in healthy food selection because they align with long term health goals. "For many of us, our short term desire for indulgent food often wins out over [long term health](#) goals like weight loss, eating healthier and exercising more," explains lead author Elisa Chan, a PhD candidate in Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, "However, we found that rewards points can counteract our impulse to indulge by appealing to the part of us that wants to make better choices in the future."

The researchers also tested their findings on 243 actual customers in a corporate cafeteria and found again that offering rewards points resulted in more salad sales than offering discounts on salads. This was especially true for people with a higher BMI.

"Not only do rewards points get customers to eat healthier, they are good for the bottom line. They help to build a returning customer base who feel good about the meals they buy," says Brian Wansink, PhD, Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and author of *Slim by Design*.

More information: E. K. Chan et al, *McHealthy: How Marketing Incentives Influence Healthy Food Choices*, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/1938965516668403](https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965516668403)

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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