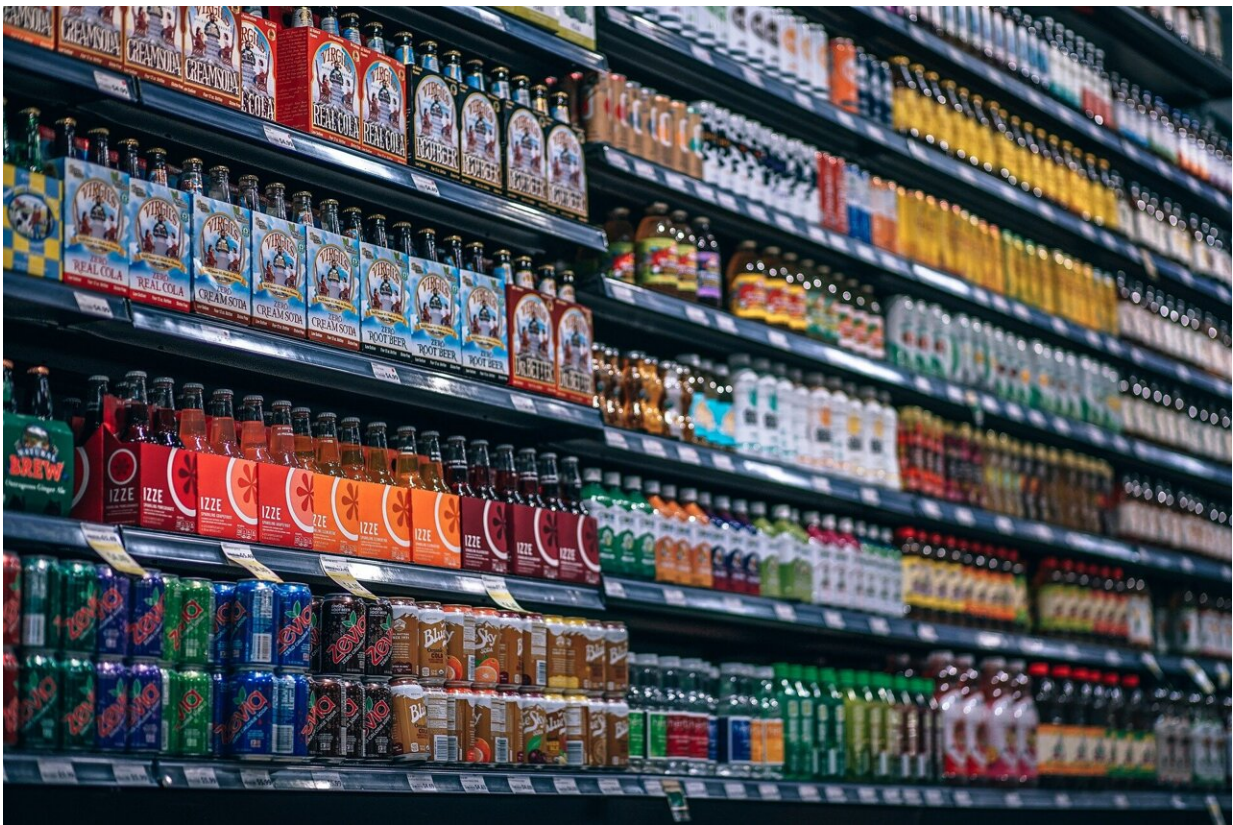


# Can supermarkets coax people into buying healthier food?

March 24 2022

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Restricting supermarket placement of less healthy items and increasing the availability of healthier alternatives in these stores may be promising interventions to encourage healthier purchasing behaviors. Those are the

conclusions of two new studies publishing March 24th in *PLOS Medicine* by Carmen Piernas and colleagues of University of Oxford, UK.

Dietary targets for saturated fat, [dietary fiber](#), sugar, and salt intake are currently not being met in the UK. Poor diets are an important risk factor for [chronic diseases](#), and many socioeconomic inequalities remain when it comes to diet. Evidence from systematic reviews has suggested that grocery [store](#) interventions may be effective at changing diet, but evidence in real supermarkets has been lacking.

In the first new study, the researchers evaluated six interventions involving the availability, placement, promotions, and signage of healthier products within three major chains of UK grocery stores. They found that increasing the availability of healthier options within a category was associated with significant changes in purchasing. For instance, stocking low-fat chips next to regular chips decreased the sales of regular chips (-23% in intervention stores vs. -4% in control stores,  $p=0.001$ ). Stocking more lower calorie biscuits increased sales by 18% and decreased purchases of regular, higher calorie biscuits by 4%.

In the second study, Piernas and colleagues evaluated a grocery store intervention to remove seasonal chocolates and candy from prominent locations within a major UK supermarket in the 7 weeks leading up to Easter. In 34 intervention stores, free-standing promotional displays of seasonal chocolate confectionery products were removed, although the candies were available elsewhere in the store. The researchers found an attenuation in the usual seasonal increase in confectionery sales; units of confectionery sales increased by 18% in the control stores during the pre-Easter period but only 5% in the intervention stores (p

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