

Offering healthy foods at high school concession stands

14 March 2014, by Drew Hanks



Adding healthier foods to concession stands can increase sales and customer satisfaction. Credit: Daniel Miller

Pep-rallies, the marching band, cheers and chants, and savory, indulgent foods sold at the concession stand are all beloved features of the American high school sports tradition.

In contrast to the nutrition requirements on breakfast and lunches sold in school cafeterias, foods sold at concession stands do not follow the standard nutrition guidelines because they are typically sold for fundraising purposes. Is there something that can be done to improve the healthful features of concession stand [food](#), and preserve the profits they generate? According to this new study the answer is yes! Co-author Brian Wansink says, "this study shows that if you give people healthy foods they will buy them and be more satisfied!"

In this study published in the *Journal of Public Health*, Dr. Helena Laroche, an assistant professor of internal medicine and pediatrics at the University

of Iowa, and her research team along with researchers from the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (B.E.N. Center) identified two successful strategies for improving the nutritional quality of foods sold at concession stands: 1) offer 5-10 healthy food options 2) modify the ingredients of popular items to contain less saturated and trans fats.

Revenue and sales data from the concessions at Muscatine High School in Muscatine, IA were collected for two fall sports seasons one year apart. In the first season, no changes were made to the foods sold. In the second season, 8 new healthier foods were sold in addition to the standard foods offered. These foods included carrots, apples, a grilled chicken sandwich, and string cheese. Furthermore, the regular nacho cheese sauce was replaced with a no trans-fat variety and the popcorn was prepared with canola oil that has less saturated fat and no trans-fat compared to the coconut oil bars previously used.

Overall, the healthier items accounted for 9.2% of total sales, a clear indication of demand for these items. Sales of these items did increase from game to game suggesting increasing interest in these foods. Income also increased by 4% when the healthier items were sold. Sales of the modified nacho's and popcorn increased by 8% despite the relatively healthier nature of the foods.

Finally, when the [healthier foods](#) were offered parental satisfaction increased.

"These results reveal the opportunities available for concession stand operators to improve the nutritional quality of what they sell, while maintaining customer satisfaction and profit," says co-author Brian Wansink. Furthermore he recommends adding 5-10 new healthful items to the concessions menu—"Adding variety, 5-10 new healthful items, will make it easier for customers to find something that they like. Try adding items such

as, granola bars, fresh fruit, string cheese and mixed nuts. Rather than removing the less healthy options, make them using healthier ingredients and preparation methods— patrons will still get the foods they love and they can feel better about eating them!"

More information: Laroche, H., Ford, C., Anderson, K., Cai, X., Just, D., Hanks, A., & Wansink, B. (2014). Concession Stand Makeovers: A Pilot Study of Offering Healthy Foods at High School Concession Stands. *Journal of Public Health*. Forthcoming.

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