

Ending promotions of unhealthy food and drinks – Briefing Paper

Obesity and overweight have become the norm in our society. Obesity is a complex issue with many causes, including genetics, but one of the biggest influences is the world we live in. The Government can play a key role in helping to shape an environment that makes it easier for everyone to be healthy.

The Obesity Health Alliance is a coalition of over 40 health organisations. **We support the Government's plan to change how unhealthy food and drinks can be promoted in shops from April 2022.**

Summary

- Research shows that consumers often make quick decisions without conscious thought in busy retail environments¹. Promotions successfully appeal to these elements of unconscious decision making to increase sales.
- The new rules will restrict promotions of HFSS (high in fat, salt and sugar) products in shops of all kinds, including:²
 - Multi-buy promotions (e.g. 'buy-one-get-one-free' offers)
 - Placement of unhealthy food and drink in prominent locations such as end of aisles, entrances and check outs, (both with similar measures applied to online shopping).
- The new rules will only apply to sugary and high calorie foods that contribute to children's sugar and excess calorie intakes, including biscuits, crisps, chocolate and pizza.
- The policy is estimated to lead to health benefits worth £5 billion, with social care savings of £1 billion³.
- This policy is part of a package of measures announced in the 2020 Tackling Obesity strategy which outlined bold action to address the multiple drivers of obesity.

Why is the Government acting to restrict promotions?

- Children's health is being affected by high levels of obesity. One in three children in England are above a healthy weight when they leave primary school⁴. Children from deprived areas are more than twice as likely to have obesity than their more affluent counterparts⁴. Addressing obesity will support Government ambitions to level up society.
- Children with obesity are five times more likely to become adults with obesity,⁵ increasing their risk of developing a range of conditions including type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease.
- Rising levels of obesity are stretching the NHS and society with direct costs in excess of £5.1 billion each year and indirect costs (due to lost productivity, unemployment and social welfare) estimated at £27 billion⁶.

Unhealthy food promotions and obesity

Multi-buy promotions

Multi-buy promotions (including 'Buy One Get One Free', 'X% extra free, and 'X for £Y' offers) are designed to encourage the impulsive purchase of products, or to increase how often we buy a product and/or the volume of product bought⁷.

- Promotions tend to be skewed towards unhealthy options. The latest government data shows that half of chocolate purchased in the UK is on promotion⁸.
- Multi-buy promotions can increase the total amount of household food and drink purchased by around 20% – these are purchases that people would not make if the price promotions did not exist⁹.
- These multi-buy price promotions do not help save money in the long-term, because people buy more products than they had planned to and do not lead to people buying less during subsequent shopping trips¹⁰.

Location promotions

Where supermarkets place products in their stores has an impact on how likely we are to buy them¹¹. Increasing the visibility of unhealthy foods by featuring them in busy eye-catching locations, such as shop entrances or aisle ends, leads to an increase in the sale of the product^{12,13}.

- In a 2018 survey by the Obesity Health Alliance, 43% of all food and drink products located in prominent areas, such as store entrances, checkout areas, aisle ends or free-standing display units (FSDUs) were for sugary foods and drinks¹⁴. Less than 1% of food and drink products promoted in high profile locations were fruit or vegetables.

Government plans to create healthier environments in shops have public support.

- 76% of people agree that multi-buy offers encourage people to buy unhealthy food. Introducing restrictions on multi-buy promotions of high calorie food is supported by 59% of people¹⁵.

For more information, please contact: caroline.cerny@obesityhealthalliance.org.uk

¹ Cohen D and Lesser L. Obesity prevention at the point of purchase. *Obesity Reviews* 2016. 17:389–396.

² Department of Health and Social Care (2020). Restricting checkout, end-of-aisle, and store entrance sales of food and drinks high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS).

³ Department of Health and Social Care (2020). Impact assessment: Restricting checkout, end-of-aisle, and store entrance sales of food and drinks high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) Accessible at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/770706/impact-assessment-restricting-checkout-end-of-aisle-and-store-entrance-sales-of-HFSS.pdf

⁴ NHS Digital (2019). Health Survey for England. Accessible at: <http://healthsurvey.hscic.gov.uk/data-visualisation/data-visualisation/explore-the-trends/weight.aspx?type=child>

⁵ Simmonds M, Llewellyn A, Owen CG, Woolacott N. Predicting adult obesity from childhood obesity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Obes Rev.* 2016 Feb;17(2):95-107.

⁶ McKinsey & Company (2014). Overcoming obesity: An initial economic analysis.

⁷ Hawkes C. Sales promotions and food consumption. *Nutrition Reviews* 2009. 67(6):333–342.

⁸ Public Health England, 2019; Sugar reduction: progress between 2015 and 2018.

⁹ Public Health England (2015). Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action - Annexe 4: An analysis of the role of price promotions on the household purchases of food and drinks high in sugar. Accessible at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-from-evidence-into-action>

¹⁰ Martin L, Bauld L and Angus K. (2017). Rapid evidence review: The impact of promotions on high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) food and drink on consumer purchasing and consumption behaviour and the effectiveness of retail environment interventions. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland.

¹¹ Wilson A, Buckley E, Buckley J and Bogomolva S. (2016). Nudging healthier food and beverage choices through salience and priming: Evidence from a systematic review. *Food Quality and Preference.* 51:47–64.

¹² Hawkes C. Sales promotions and food consumption. *Nutrition Reviews* 2009. 67(6):333–342.

Cohen D and Lesser L. Obesity prevention at the point of purchase. *Obesity Reviews* 2016. 17:389–396.

¹³ Thornton L, Cameron A, McNaughton S et al. The availability of snack food displays that may trigger impulse purchases in Melbourne supermarkets. *BMC Public Health* 2012. 12:194.

¹⁴ Obesity Health Alliance (2018). Out of Place – the extent of unhealthy food promotions in supermarkets.

¹⁵ Prepared by YouGov plc on behalf of Cancer Research UK. 3rd April 2018.