

# USING BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TO INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S DIETS

## A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

The global prevalence of childhood **overweight and obesity continues to rise**. Many children live in obesogenic environments that encourage the consumption of energy-dense foods.

Policies informed by '**behavioural insights**' have shown potential for improving children's diets.

### What are behavioural insights?

Behavioural insights (BI) **help to understand how people make choices in everyday life**, drawing on disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology and neuroscience.

Usually, BI are used in interventions to make **subtle changes to the environment** without actively restricting available options.

This review investigated the effectiveness of five such interventions.

### 1. Information provision

Providing **nutritional facts or changing serving size indications** on packages will, by themselves, not be sufficient to change behaviour in children. Such actions can, however, be more effective if combined with other interventions.

### 2. Salience and social norms

Interventions using visual cues, such as **positive emojis next to healthy options**, were found to lead to changes in behaviour by 76% of studies.

**Social modelling** by teachers or peers were also effective. Verbal cues were least so.

### 3. Default

Adapting default options, like **changing the main side dish option** to a healthier one, was effective according to 71% of studies.

### 4. Physical environment

Changing **portion sizes**, or improving the **accessibility of healthy options** compared to unhealthy ones were also effective. 80% of studies showed significant results.

### 5. Incentives

Using incentives such as stickers, stationary or temporary tattoos were also effective. Using **simple social rewards can be a promising and low-cost approach** for changing children's health behaviours.

### What can be done with this knowledge?

The review showed that there is **significant potential to change children's behaviour in school settings at a low cost**. Even small changes in children's environments can significantly influence diet-related outcomes.

Interventions **targeting healthier options** were found to be more effective than those targeting unhealthy ones.

However, **too little is known about sustained effects on health and health equity**, and longer-term cost-effectiveness. Interventions using BI, combined with other policy approaches are worth further investigation.





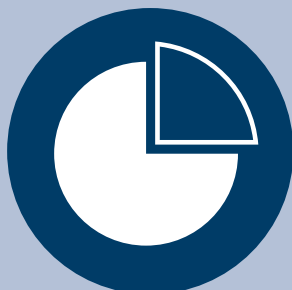
Science and Technology in  
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# Using behavioural insights to influence children's diets

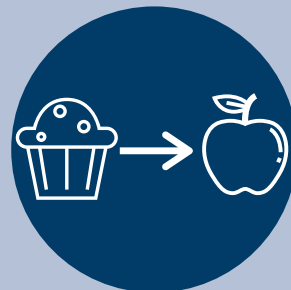
## Most effective interventions to influence children's diets based on Behavioural Insights:



USING  
INCENTIVES



MODIFYING  
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



CHANGING  
DEFAULTS

INTERVENTIONS ARE MOST  
SUCCESSFUL IF THEY ARE TARGETED  
AT HEALTHIER OPTIONS INSTEAD  
OF UNHEALTHY OPTIONS.



## Future research should focus on:

FOOD RETAIL AND  
HOME SETTINGS



HEALTH EQUITY

SUSTAINABILITY



COST-  
EFFECTIVENESS

