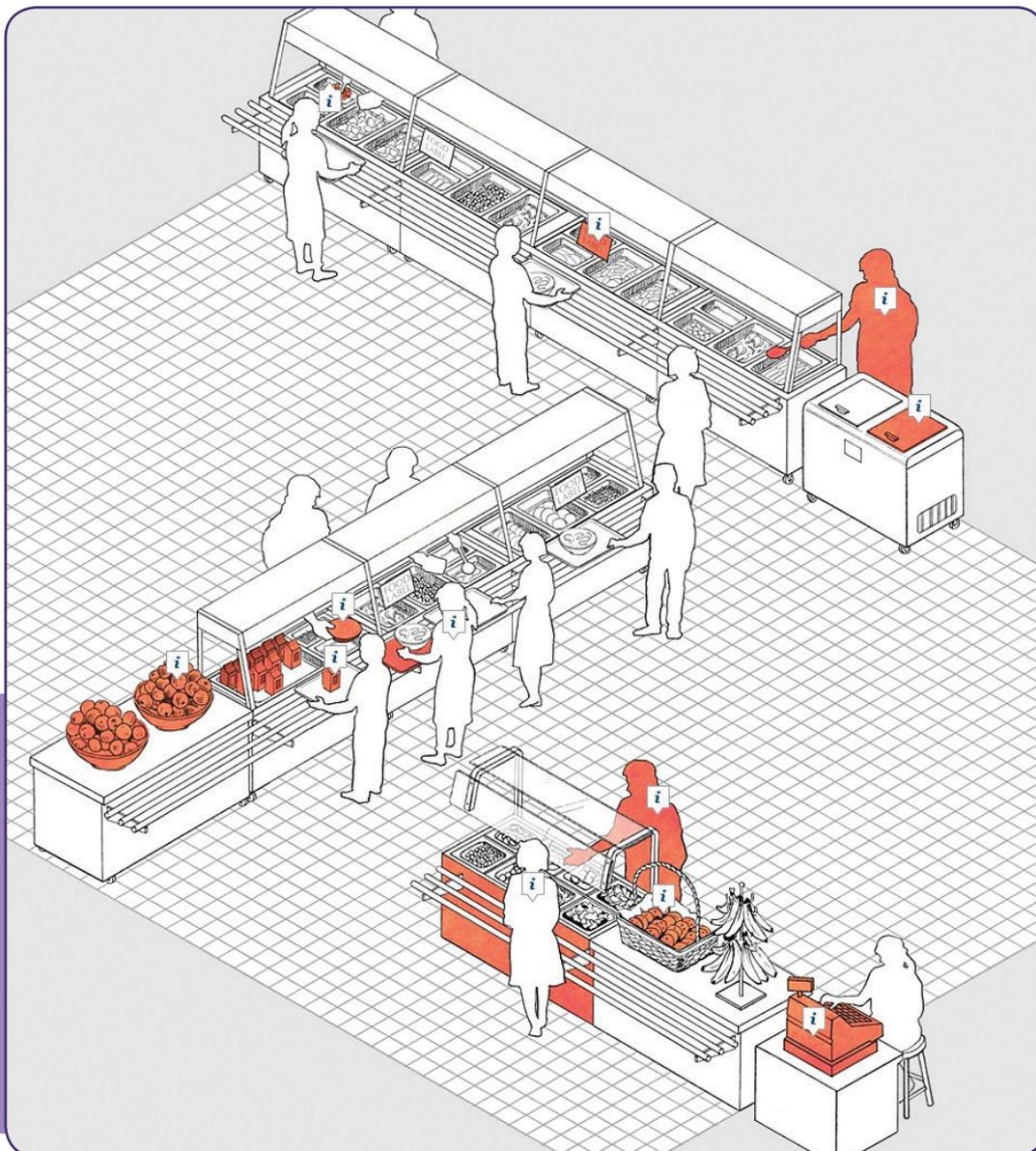


Smarter Lunchrooms: Lunch Line Redesign

School cafeterias are often criticized for offering the kind of snack foods and desserts that contribute to childhood obesity. But banning junk food from cafeterias, as some schools have tried, or serving

only escarole or tofu, can backfire. Students then skip lunch, bring in their own snacks or head out for fast food. We've even seen some pizzas delivered to a side door.



Children and teenagers resist heavy-handed nutritional policies and the food that is associated with the heavy hand.

No food is nutritious, after all, until it is actually eaten.

Smarter lunchrooms nudge students toward making better choices on their own by changing the way their options are presented. One school we have observed in upstate New York, for instance, tripled the number of salads students bought simply by moving the salad bar away from the wall and placing it in front of the cash registers.

Experiments done in cafeterias at high schools, middle schools and summer camp programs, as well as in laboratories, have revealed many ways to use behavioral psychology to coax children to eat better.

From: The New York Times, October 21, 2010, Accessed June 2015 at: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/10/21/opinion/20101021_Oplunch.html

Here are a dozen such strategies that work without requiring drastic or expensive changes in school menus.

Simple changes make a big difference:

1. Placing nutritious foods at the beginning of the line increased sales by 10-15%.
2. Giving healthy foods descriptive names increased their sales by 27%.
3. Students are more likely to EAT their vegetables if given a choice of two vegetables as opposed to being required to take a single choice.
4. Hiding ice cream treats in a freezer with an opaque lid significantly reduced sales.
5. When students use trays, vegetable consumption increases. When students do not have trays, they eat 21% less salad, but no less ice cream.
6. Decreasing cereal bowl size at breakfast from 18 ounces to 14 ounces decreased cereal consumption by 24%.
7. Plain milk sales increase when the chocolate milk is hidden behind the plain milk.
8. Using attractive bowls for fruit on serving lines instead of stainless steel pans doubled fruit sales.
9. Asking students “Do you want a salad?” increased salad sales by one-third.
10. Putting a salad bar in front of the checkout area tripled salad bar sales.
11. Allowing only cash payments for treats increased fruit sales by 71% and decreased dessert sales by 55%.
12. Offering an express line for students purchasing healthy meals that did not include chips, candy or desserts doubled sales of healthy sandwiches.

Food for thought:

1. How does food placement — both location and type of display — seem to affect the choices students make in the cafeteria?
2. How do direct appeals, in the form of questions from cafeteria workers and descriptive text, seem to affect choice?
3. How would you describe and categorize the other strategies?
4. Why do you think these strategies resulted in more students buying more healthful foods?

Brainstorming in groups:

1. Simple changes can make a huge difference. What simple changes can you make in your cafeteria?
2. What bigger changes may need to happen in your cafeteria to help increase student acceptance of healthy school meals?
3. Complete a SWOT analysis of your school’s food service program in light of the principles of the Smarter Lunchroom Movement.



Smarter Lunchrooms: Lunch Line Redesign Activity

Strengths: What do we do well?

Weaknesses: What can we do better?

Opportunities: What can we do to address our weaknesses?

Threats: What stands in our way of addressing our weaknesses?

Short-term Goals

- 1.
- 2.

Long-term Goals

- 1.
- 2.