

How simple food price changes can promote healthier eating

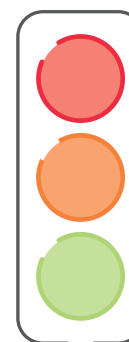
PRICE case study: YMCA everyday pricing changes initiative

YMCA Victoria is committed to helping Victorians live healthier lives. As part of this commitment, they trialled an 'everyday pricing change' initiative to increase consumption of healthy food options. The results show that decreasing the price of 'green' healthy foods and increasing the price of 'red' unhealthy foods can nudge customers towards healthier options.




This case study focuses on an 'everyday pricing change' initiative trialled in one YMCA aquatic and recreation centre, where the price of healthy foods was reduced by 9 per cent and the price of unhealthy food was increased by 10.5 per cent. Interviews with food retail managers were conducted to understand the process and perceived outcomes of the trial. Customer surveys assessed both the level of awareness of, and support for, this intervention. Food and beverage sales data was analysed before and after the pricing changes were made.

Price changes for RED and GREEN foods

	RED	GREEN	
 10.5% Unhealthy food prices	Potato cakes \$1.45 ↑ \$1.60 Dim sims \$1.45 ↑ \$1.60	Sandwiches \$7.25 ↓ \$6.50	 8.9% Healthy food prices
 Limit intake	Hot chips \$4.10 ↑ \$4.50 Icy poles \$1.75 ↑ \$2.00 Ice creams \$2.70 ↑ \$2.90	Paninis \$9.25 ↓ \$8.50	 Best choice



The [Healthy choices: food and drink classification guide](#) uses a [traffic light system](#) to classify foods and drinks as:

-  **Red:** Limit intake
-  **Amber:** Choose carefully
-  **Green:** Best choice

“The YMCA (as a whole) and our centre are dedicated to the YMCA's healthy eating policy... so, this was just another way to help increase our healthy food sales.”

– Centre manager of a YMCA Aquatic and Recreation Centre

“We're in an area where people care about what the cost of something is, so having some cheap healthy food I think is going to encourage people to take those options.”

– Café manager of a YMCA Aquatic and Recreation Centre

Keys findings



Significant reduction in the sale of 'red' products. 86% lower in the final week of the study!



Staff found the changes easy to implement because changing prices is normal and there was no need to promote the change to customers.



High level of support from customers.



No perceived impact on sales – in fact managers chose to maintain the price changes after the study had finished.



Café management felt good about making changes that give better health outcomes to customers.

“

We just had the regular change, like an annual price increase. We're pretty used to just increasing all our prices at a certain time of year, so we just used the same procedure.”

– Café manager of a YMCA Aquatic and Recreation Centre

How to introduce simple everyday price changes that make a difference



Think carefully about which products to target
Our research shows that successful interventions focus on products with manageable profit margins and specific product groups (e.g. hot foods or sandwiches).



Decide on a price change percentage in advance
Our research shows that just a 10% increase on unhealthy items and a 10% decrease on healthy items can result in healthier purchases.



Ensure all staff members are aware of the changes and have the support they need
Our research shows that this is made easier by staff being used to changing the prices for normal business processes.



Make the change!
Keep an eye on product sales and customer feedback to see if you need to tweak anything.

Want to know more?

For more information on how to introduce healthy changes to your food retail setting, contact Healthy Eating Advisory Service on 1300 22 52 88 or email heas@nutritionaustralia.org

Reference: Huse O, Orellana L, Ferguson M, Palermo C, Jerebine A, Zorbas C, Boelsen-Robinson T, Blake MR, Peeters A, Brimblecombe J, Moodie M, Backholer K. 2020. *Retailer-led healthy pricing interventions: a pilot study within Victorian aquatic and recreation centres*. Health Promotion International. In press.



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