

Background

- Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project (HONU) is a 10-year demonstration project aimed at reducing heart attacks and coronary heart disease (CHD) in a rural Minnesota community. HONU delivers environmental, peer leadership and individual interventions through the health care system, worksites and the general community. For more information, visit www.heartsbeatback.org.
- HONU FoodWorks aims to address poor nutrition habits that contribute to CHD risk through: 1) partnerships with grocery stores, restaurants and convenience stores to alter food environment; and 2) consumer education about healthy choices.
- A recent trend report found that 52% of convenience store customers would like to see more healthful food items and 47% would like to see more healthful beverages available.¹

Methods

- All five convenience stores in New Ulm, Minn., were assessed in early 2010 with the Nutrition Environment Measures Survey in Stores (NEMS-S).²
- Stores were given reports with their NEMS-S results.
- Two large convenience stores were recruited to participate in the initial consumer campaign, which began in October 2010. The other three stores did not have the healthy snacks available to participate.
- After the campaign was implemented, a customer exit survey was conducted at each participating store. Eighty-six surveys were conducted on two days in August 2011.



Baseline Findings

NEMS-S Findings: Healthy Food and Beverage Availability (n=5 stores)

Healthy Item	Stores Offering Item (n)
Low-fat/skim milk	5
Fruit	3
Vegetables	1
Reduced-fat frozen dinners	2
Whole grain bread	1
Low-fat baked goods	1
Baked chips	4
Healthier cereals	3

Convenience Store Customers' Purchasing Patterns

- About 60% buy snack food daily or weekly at a convenience store.
- Nearly 20% report buying beverages daily and another 49% report buying drinks at convenience stores weekly.

SnackSWAP Campaign

- Fourteen snacks were identified in each of the two participating stores as being healthier choices by meeting the following criteria: ≤ 300 calories, ≤ 12 gram fat, ≤ 3 grams saturated fat, and containing at least one of the following: > 2 grams fiber, ≥ 5 or more grams protein or at least one half serving of fruits or vegetables. Snacks were identified and promoted through posters, brochures and wallet cards. Customers were asked to SWAP one identified snack for a usual snack to save calories and improve heart health.
- A kickoff event was held at each of the participating stores to draw attention to the campaign. Free fruit was provided to customers at the event.
- The campaign began in October 2010 and continues to run in stores today.
- One-third of the customers were aware of the campaign and 36% of customers who purchased food or drink from the store reported seeing the campaign materials. Thirty-four percent of people who purchased food or drink purchased an item promoted through the campaign.
- Of the customers seeing the campaign materials, 45% indicated that the information influenced their purchase decision.

Results/Conclusions

- The NEMS-S assessment and personalized written summary report provided observational data to present to the store managers. The meeting created an opportunity to build relationships between HONU and store personnel and start a conversation about the importance of access, availability and affordability of healthful food choices for customers.
- The NEMS-S tool can be used in planning interventions to improve the convenience store food environment and meeting customer requests for making more healthful food and beverages available.
- Among customers who made store food and beverage purchases, those who saw the campaign materials were more likely to buy a SnackSWAP item than those who did not. However, due to the low number of survey respondents, it is difficult to detect a true difference between those who made purchases and those who did not.
- There is an opportunity to investigate ways to improve the awareness of campaign messages in convenience stores. Survey respondents suggested putting signage in more obvious areas, such as near coffee machines, restrooms, store entrance doors, or in hot food areas. Other suggestions were to advertise at the gas pumps, have a display of healthy options, put fruit in the same section as candy, and to offer a more diverse selection of healthier foods.
- More than half of convenience store customers who enter the store are buying food and beverages during their visit. Opportunities exist to improve healthy food availability at convenience stores. Therefore, convenience stores appear to be an important venue for nutrition environment improvements.

Funding Disclosure

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References

1. The Convenience Store Foodservice Consumer Trend Report Attitude and Usage Survey. Technomic 2010.
2. Glanz K, Sallis JF, Saelens BE, Frank LD. Nutrition Environment Measures Survey in Stores (NEMS-S): development and evaluation. *Am J Prev Med* 2007;32:282-289.

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