ISRCTN27598623 https://doi.org/10.1186/ISRCTN27598623

To what extent can the effects of increasing healthier food availability on food selection be explained by individual food preferences?

Submission date
22/11/2019

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
03/12/2019

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
27/10/2022

Condition category
Nutritional, Metabolic, Endocrine

[X] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Increasing the availability of healthier or more plant-based foods increases their selection. One possible mechanism that might underlie these effects is individuals' prior preferences, whereby selections reflect individuals' most-preferred option from the available range. The aim of the study is to investigate the role of prior preferences in the effectiveness of availability interventions.

Who can participate?
Adults over the age of 18 with no dietary restrictions

What does the study involve?
The study will be conducted online. First, the study will establish each participant's baseline relative preferences between all the food options used in the study. To do so, participants are asked to choose which option they would prefer to eat right now from pairs of food options. These pairs represent every possible pairing of food options used in the study. This allows each food option to subsequently be ranked in terms of each participant's preferences. Participants are then shown four images, with four options displayed in each, and asked to again select the option they would most like to eat right now. These images will show either predominantly-less-healthy branded snacks, predominantly-healthier branded snacks, predominantly-less-healthy unbranded main meals, or predominantly-healthier unbranded main meals. Each predominantly-less-healthy set will contain three options defined as less-healthy and one healthier option; vice versa for the predominantly-healthier sets. Participants will see each of these four images in a random order. The data from the study will be used to assess the extent to which increasing the availability of healthier options alters the healthiness of participants' most-preferred option and the extent to which the option selected by participants corresponds to their most-preferred option.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Participants will be paid standard market research panel rates for participating in this study. There are no known risks of participating in the study.

Where is the study run from?
Behaviour and Health Research Unit, University of Cambridge (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
October 2019 to July 2020

Who is funding the study?
Wellcome Trust (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Rachel Pechey, rachel.pechey@phc.ox.ac.uk
(updated 07/01/2021, previously: rachel.pechey@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Contact information

Type(s)
Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
RG77630

Study information

Scientific Title
Increasing the relative availability of healthier vs. less healthy food: Can impact be explained in terms of prior preferences?

Study objectives

1. Reducing less healthy options and increasing healthier options increases the likelihood of participants' most-preferred option being a healthier option
1.1. Reducing less healthy options and increasing healthier options increases the likelihood of participants' most-preferred option being a healthier option to a greater extent for those with higher education (vs. lower education)
2. Participants' most-preferred option within the offered range of products will often, but not always, correspond to the option that participants select
2.1. Participants' most-preferred option within the offered range of products is more likely to correspond to the option that participants select when the option selected is less healthy (vs. healthier)
2.2. Participants' most-preferred option within the offered range of products is more likely to correspond to the option that participants select when the options offered are branded snacks (vs. unbranded main meals)

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 05/11/2019, Cambridge Psychology Research Ethics Committee (School of the Biological Sciences, University of Cambridge, 17 Mill Lane, Cambridge CB2 1RX; +44 (0)1223 766894; Cheryl.Torbett@admin.cam.ac.uk), ref: PRE.2019.087

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
2x2 within-subjects randomized crossover study

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Unhealthy diet

Interventions
Participants are randomly allocated to the order in which they complete four conditions as part of the online study. The four conditions will vary in terms of the mix of healthier and less healthy foods offered and the type of food offered:
Condition 1: Selection contains 1 healthier and 3 less healthy branded snacks.
Condition 2: Selection contains 3 healthier and 1 less healthy branded snacks.
Condition 3: Selection contains 1 healthier and 3 less healthy unbranded main meals.
Condition 4: Selection contains 3 healthier and 1 less healthy unbranded main meals.

Participants will be shown an image of a set of options representing each condition, in a random order. For each image, participants will be asked to select which option they would prefer to eat right now.

The food options assigned to each condition will be randomly selected from a pool of available healthier vs. less-healthy options. The position of selected food options in each image will also be randomised. Randomisation will be performed by the Qualtrics survey platform.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. Healthiness (healthier vs. less-healthy) of participants' most-preferred option (measured via rankings determined from selections between each possible item pair in the first part of the study) in each of the four conditions in the online selection task
2. Correspondence between participants' selections in each of the four conditions in the online selection task and their most-preferred options (measured via rankings determined from selections between each possible item pair in the first part of the study)

Key secondary outcome(s)
Selection of a healthier (vs. less healthy) food option in the online selection task for each of the four conditions

Completion date
31/01/2020

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Adults aged over 18 years
2. Participants currently residing within the UK

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
1976

Key exclusion criteria
Dietary restrictions

Date of first enrolment
09/12/2019

Date of final enrolment
20/12/2019

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Behaviour and Health Research Unit
University of Cambridge
Institute of Public Health
Forvie Site, Robinson Way
Cambridge
United Kingdom
CB2 0SR

Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Cambridge

ROR
https://ror.org/013meh722

Funder(s)

Funder type
Research organisation

Funder Name
Wellcome Trust

Alternative Name(s)

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
International organizations

Location

United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The data sharing plans for the current study are unknown and will be made available at a later date.

IPD sharing plan summary

Data sharing statement to be made available at a later date

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		30/04/2022	27/10/2022	Yes	No