

# To sell more healthy food, keep it simple

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Despite extensive research on how to persuade consumers to improve their diets, academicians have largely failed to present food retailers with easy-to-use suggestions. Brian Wansink, director of Cornell's Food and Brand Lab and a leading expert in changing eating behavior, seeks to change this by providing an organizing framework that integrates insights from marketing, nutrition, psychology, public health, and behavioral economics research to suggest dozens of small, low-cost, in-store changes that retailers can use to boost sales of fish versus hamburger and apples instead of candy bars.

In "Healthy Profits: An Interdisciplinary Retail Framework that Increases the Sales of Healthy Foods," to be published in the June 2017 issue of the *Journal of Retailing*, Wansink sketches out a health predisposition pyramid - in essence, a hierarchy that places health-vigilant shoppers at the top and health-disinterested shoppers at the base, with so-called health-predisposed shoppers in the middle. He points out that different marketing interventions are more or less successful with each of these groups. For instance, research has shown that shoppers who are most interested in healthy eating are more interested than health-disinterested shoppers in recipe kiosks that might suggest ways to cook [fish](#), whereas candy-free checkout aisles and front-of-store fruit displays attract all categories of shoppers.

Where, how, and when retailers can best influence shoppers are all areas that call for more research, Wansink points out, and at the same time, the studies that have been done, while providing valuable insights, form no cohesive, actionable plan for retailers. Wansink advocates a

comprehensive approach that focuses on making the selection of healthy foods convenient, attractive, and normal (CAN) and provides a retail intervention matrix that organizes key research findings into a sensible pattern that is easy to understand and practical to implement.

The intervention matrix was put to work in Norway by a large grocery chain seeking to reposition itself around environmentally sustainable fish. All 457 stores in the chain used the traditional marketing mix of altering the variety, packaging, advertising, and price promotions of fish. Over a two-year period, these efforts consistently increased sales by 9 percent. Subsequently, 239 stores added strategies from the intervention matrix; the average increase was 28 percent more fish per transaction than in the first group of stores. "This example shows one way research findings can be extrapolated, organized, and presented in a way that is compelling for managers who have little time or tolerance for ambiguity and nuance," says Wansink.

**More information:** *Journal of Retailing* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2017.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2017.12.007)

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