

Healthy Recipe Cards as Part of a Food Pre-Ordering Program in Food Insecure Neighborhoods: A Field Experiment

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We conducted a pilot natural field experiment, in collaboration with a community-based NFP food box pre-ordering program, in food insecure neighborhoods in Chicago, IL. The goal of the study was to understand the impact of providing healthy food recipes on increasing the purchasing of fruits and vegetables. The use of healthy recipe cards as a behavioral intervention is relatively low cost to implement; many cooperative extension and community-based nutrition programs already have such recipe cards as part of existing programming efforts.

During July 2016, when existing customers (N=245) picked up their preordered food boxes, they were randomized into either a control group, or into a recipe card treatment group. Customers in the treatment group received recipe cards focused on preparing healthy meals from fruits and vegetables. Of these existing customers, 80% returned to place an order in August. Conditional on making an order in August and controlling for past purchasing behavior, customers randomized into the recipe treatment were significantly more likely to include fruit and/or vegetable boxes in their order. The impact appears strongest for fruit. Placing an order for fruits and/or vegetables in July is significantly associated with placing an order for fruits and/or vegetables in August.

This pilot research suggests recipe cards can be an effective intervention to improve the fruit and vegetable purchasing of low socio-economic status households. Behavioral interventions featuring recipe cards could easily be employed by SNAP-ED, cooperative extension, and other programs serving low-income consumers to better inform the development of evidence-based strategies for promoting healthy food purchasing.

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