The global prevalence of childhood **overweight and obesity continues to rise.** Many children live in obesogenic environments that encourage the consumption of energy-dense foods.

Policies informed by ‘**behavioural insights**’ have shown potential for improving children's diets.

**What are behavioural insights?**

Behavioural insights (BI) **help to understand how people make choices in everyday life,** drawing on disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology and neuroscience.

Usually, BI are used in interventions to make **subtle changes to the environment** without actively restricting available options.

**This review investigated the effectiveness of five such interventions.**

1. **Information provision**

   Providing *nutritional facts* or changing serving size indications on packages will, by themselves, not be sufficient to change behaviour in children. Such actions can, however, be more effective if combined with other interventions.

2. **Salience and social norms**

   Interventions using visual cues, such as *positive emojis next to healthy options*, were found to lead to changes in behaviour by 76% of studies.

   **Social modelling** by teachers or peers were also effective. Verbal cues were least so.

3. **Default**

   Adapting default options, like *changing the main side dish option* to a healthier one, was effective according to 71% of studies.

4. **Physical environment**

   Changing *portion sizes*, or improving the accessibility of *healthy options* compared to unhealthy ones were also effective. 80% of studies showed significant results.

5. **Incentives**

   Using incentives such as stickers, stationary or temporary tattoos were also effective. Using *simple social rewards can be a promising and low-cost approach* for changing children's health behaviours.

**What can be done with this knowledge?**

The review showed that there is **significant potential to change children’s behaviour in school settings at a low cost.** Even small changes in children's environments can significantly influence diet-related outcomes.

Interventions targeting *healthier options* were found to be more effective than those targeting unhealthy ones.

However, **too little is known about sustained effects on health and health equity,** and longer-term cost-effectiveness. Interventions using BI, combined with other policy approaches are worth further investigation.

---


Find out more about the STOP project here: [stopchildobesity.eu](http://stopchildobesity.eu)
INTERVENTIONS ARE MOST SUCCESSFUL IF THEY ARE TARGETED AT HEALTHIER OPTIONS INSTEAD OF UNHEALTHY OPTIONS.

Most effective interventions to influence children's diets based on Behavioural Insights:

- Using incentives
- Modifying physical environment
- Changing defaults

Future research should focus on:

- Food retail and home settings
- Sustainability
- Health equity
- Cost-effectiveness

STOP (Science and Technology in childhood Obesity Policy)
stopchildobesity.eu/