

## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### What are Nudges?

Whether it is displaying cabbage in an attractive bin, making whole wheat bread visible at multiple points throughout the food pantry line or adding a shelf tag that explains the health benefits of oatmeal, subtle changes to a food pantry environment have been shown to encourage people in need to make healthful choices. The field of behavioral economics offers useful strategies applicable to nutrition education. One set of strategies, known as “nudges,” are designed to leverage cues in the environment that can influence the decisions individuals make about their food, including encouraging consumers to make healthier food choices such as fruit, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy—foods Feeding America categorizes as “Foods to Encourage” (F2E).

### Did you know?

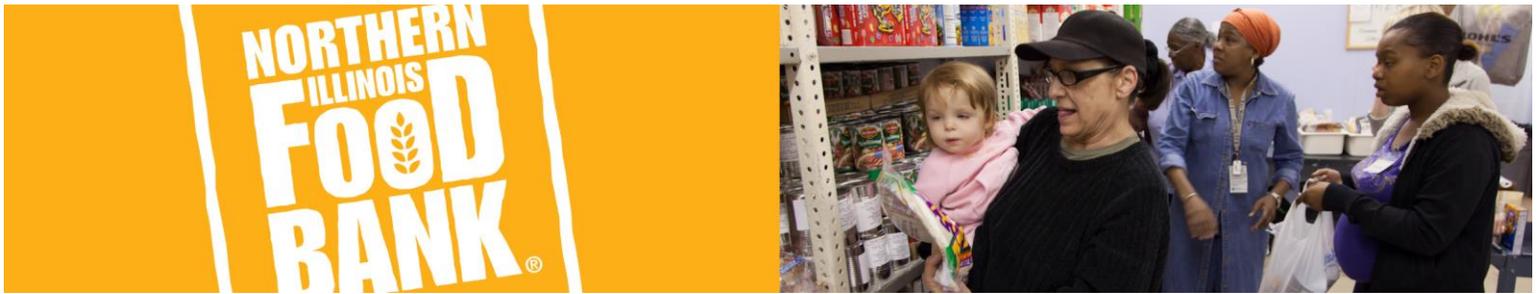
**Placement Matters** – Shoppers are less inclined to take items as their baskets fill up. For this reason, it is important to place Foods to Encourage early in a shopper’s path when their baskets are relatively empty.

**Price tags are important** – This is even the case when the person choosing the food is not paying monetarily. A price tag signifies that something is valuable, and when a product has a price tag, a shopper is one-third more likely to pick that product up.

**Signage Helps** – Waiting areas can be great places to encourage healthy food selection. Posters that display attractive images of Foods to Encourage can lead shoppers to select the pictured items when they are making food choices.

**Abundance Counts** – The appearance of abundance also leads to selection. This means that showcasing more Foods to Encourage will increase the amount of healthy food people select. It also means the opposite is true –decreasing the visibility of less-nutritious foods will limit their selection. This is true when showcasing fresh produce, it is important to present it in containers that appear to be fully stocked. When a shelf, box or crate appears mostly empty, shoppers are more likely to pass up the contents.

**Visibility is Key** – Shoppers like to see the products they are choosing. In addition to representing abundance, ensure the visibility of Foods to Encourage items by angling the food crate down so the crate’s lip does not obscure the shopper’s view. This truly showcases the product – which as mentioned – can help increase its selection.



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

#### Recipe card placement near F2E items

Having recipes that include fresh produce leads low-income mothers to serve more fresh fruits and vegetables (Birmingham, Schulz and Edlefsen). This is because having access to the recipe leads them to be more confident that they will be able to use the produce. More than 40% of supermarket shoppers would like to be given healthy recipes in the store (FMI).

#### Where to find recipes:

Northern Illinois Food Bank: <http://solvehungertoday.org/get-help/nutrition/>

Healthy Food Bank Hub (Feeding America): <http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/>

Recipes for Healthy Living (American Diabetes Association): <http://www.diabetes.org/mfa-recipes/>

Heart Healthy Recipes (American Heart Association):  
[http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes\\_UCM\\_465114\\_RecipeLanding.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes_UCM_465114_RecipeLanding.jsp)

USDA: <http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

**NORTHERN ILLINOIS FOOD BANK**

### Healthy Crispy Potato Skins

Recipe Courtesy of Mayo Clinic

**Ingredients**

- 2 medium russet potatoes
- Cooking spray
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary or
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary **\*See Dietitian Tip**
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

**Directions**

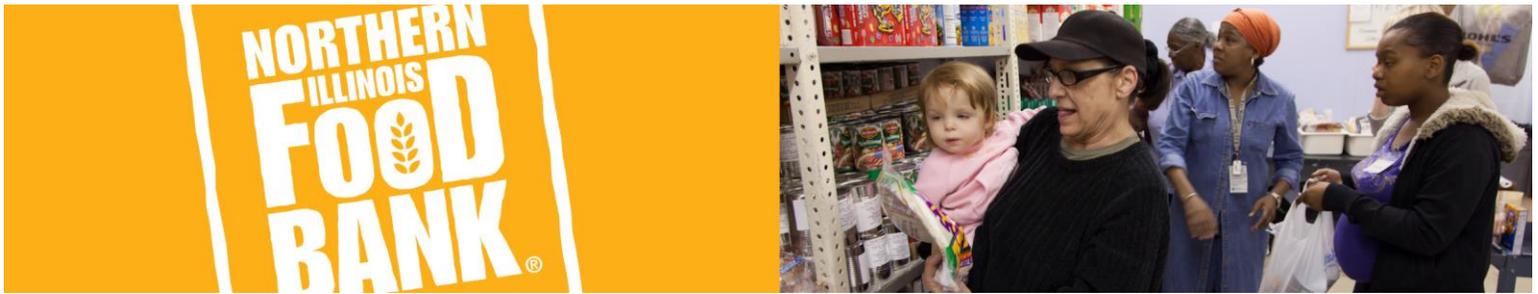
1. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Wash the potatoes and pierce with a fork. Place in the oven and bake until the skins are crisp, about 1 hour.
2. Carefully — potatoes will be very hot — cut the potatoes in half and scoop out the pulp, leaving about 1/8 inch of the potato flesh attached to the skin. Save the pulp and use for **Healthy Mashed Potatoes (see recipe below)**.
3. Spray the inside of each potato skin with the cooking spray. Press in the rosemary and pepper.
4. Return the skins to the oven for 5 to 10 minutes. Serve immediately.

**Dietitian Tip:**  
You can use any number of herbs or spices to season the potato skins. Try basil, chives, dill, garlic, cayenne pepper, caraway seed, tarragon or thyme.

#### References:

Birmingham, B., J. A. Shultz and M. Edlefsen. Evaluation of a Five-a-Day Recipe Booklet for Enhancing the Use of Fruits and Vegetables in Low-Income Households. *Journal of Community Health* 29(2004):45-62.

Food Marketing Institute. Helping Shoppers Overcome the Barriers to Choosing Healthful Foods, 2010.



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

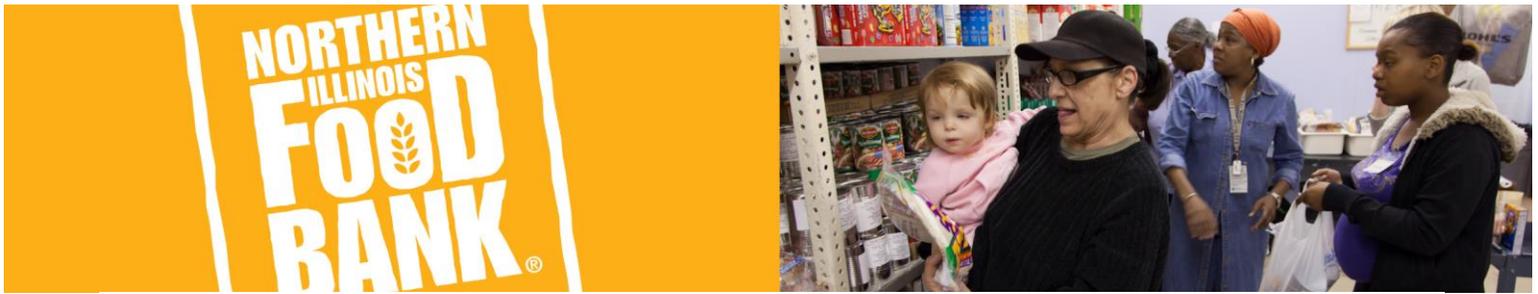
#### Suggesting an amount to help normalize behavior of taking more F2E Foods

Signs that inform clients that average family takes 5 produce items increases produce takings by more than 10%. Signs were placed inside of shopping carts facing the client. Signs included some positive imaging (a happy face, with a thumbs up sign). By indicating how much others take, the signs create a social norm. Individuals who take less feel they should increase their takings. However, we must also worry about people who already choose more than 5 choosing less. This can be avoided by including positive reinforcement regarding the decision to choose more. In this case, we have included the thumbs up sign, associating the choice of produce with something positive.



### References:

Payne, Collin R., Mihai Niculescu and David R. Just. "Shopper Marketing Nutrition Interventions." *Physiology and Behavior*, forthcoming.



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

**Pairing F2E items to create a package meal idea (to help consumers know how to pair more F2E together and make a meal idea simple) aka Bundling food**

When foods are bundled together for convenience, up to 18% more will take the bundled food – even if the bundled food is relatively more healthy. This can also result in up to a 25% reduction in consumption of unbundles less healthy items (Hanks et al.). This is true even when there is no price advantage for the bundled foods. Consumers view this bundling as a social norm and thus value the bundled food more than they would if the foods were not bundled together (Sharpe and Staelin). More than 40% of supermarket shoppers would like to be given healthy recipes in the store (FMI).

**Right: Whole Wheat Pasta, Milk, Corn, Cream of Mushroom Soup and Canned Tuna are bundled together with a Tuna Noodle Casserole Recipe**

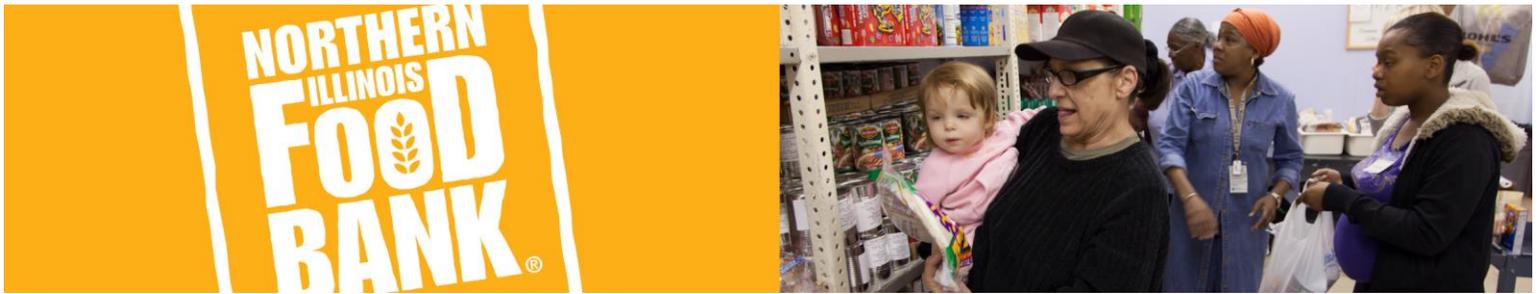


### References:

Hanks, A. S., Just, D. R., Smith, L. E., & Wansink, B. Healthy convenience: nudging students toward healthier choices in the lunchroom. *Journal of Public Health* 34(2012):370-376.

Sharpe, K.S., R. Staelin. Consumption Effects of Bundling: Consumer Perceptions, Firm Actions and Public Policy Implications. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 29(2010):170-188.

Food Marketing Institute. *Helping Shoppers Overcome the Barriers to Choosing Healthful Foods*, 2010.



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

### Cooking Demos on site showing easy “how to” techniques in preparing F2E Foods

Cooking demonstrations are an effective way to improve client’s perception of how easy or desirable it is to cook (Levy and Auld). Moreover, cooking demonstrations provide an engaging and interactive way to bring clients into your food pantry. Providing such demonstrations was the biggest factor in the growth of Indiana farmers markets in a recent study (Hofman, Dennis and Marshall 2009). Low-income parents cite cooking demonstrations frequently when asked about what sorts of education would be of most interest in regard to nourishing their families. Participating in cooking demonstrations increases the chance a child will eat a food by more than 100% (Just, Wansink and Hanks; Just, Hanks and Wansink).



### References:

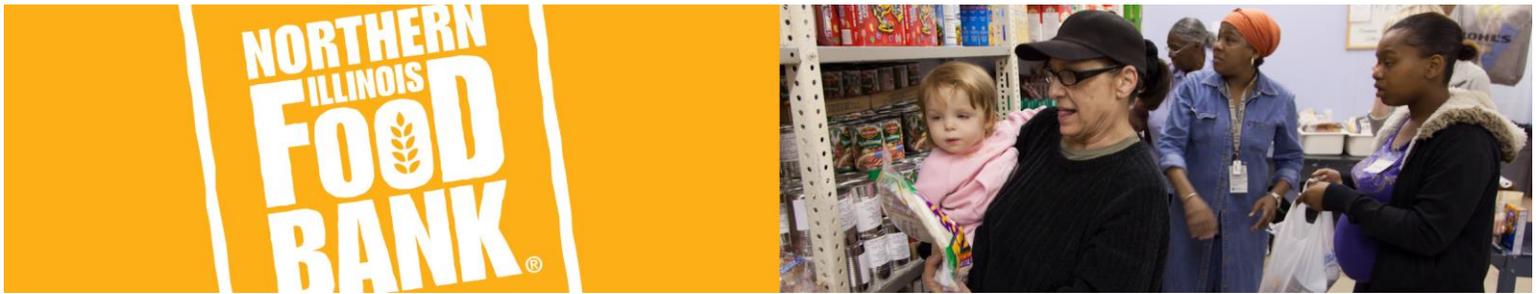
Hoffman, C., J.H. Dennis and M. Marshall. Factors Influencing the Growth of Farmers’ Markets in Indiana. *HortScience* 44(2009):712-716.

Just, D.R., A.Hanks and B. Wansink. A School Garden Before/After Pilot Study. In submission.

Just, D.R., B. Wansink and A. Hanks. Chefs move to schools. A pilot examination of how chef-created dishes can increase school lunch participation and fruit and vegetable intake. *Appetite*, forthcoming.

Levy, J. and G. Auld “Cooking Classes Outperform Cooking Demonstrations for College Sophomores.” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 36(2004):197-203.

Slusser, W., M. Prelip, J. Kinsler, J. T. Erasquin, C. Thai and C. Neumann. Challenges to parent nutrition education: a qualitative study of parents of urban children attending low-income schools. *Public Health Nutrition* 14(2011):1833-1841.



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

**Tasting sessions of F2E to help increase acceptability of items and or increase distribution of F2E item**

Several studies have found that individuals grow in their preference for a food the more they are exposed to it (Pliner et al.). This is true both with adults and with children (Pliner et al., Sullivan and Birch). Much of taste is suggestible. For example, when food is given an attractive name, they will rate it as tasting better and report that they are more likely to try it again (Wansink, Payne and North). One way to suggest a better taste is through taste demonstrations. Such demonstrations can suggest a higher quality taste to the clients by placing signals that the food is of a high quality. This can include using high quality plates (Wansink, Payne and Painter), having a chef present (Just, Wansink and Hanks), or simply making the presentation of the food more attractive.

***Right: Taste samples of a pasta salad made with whole wheat penne pasta and assorted vegetables.***



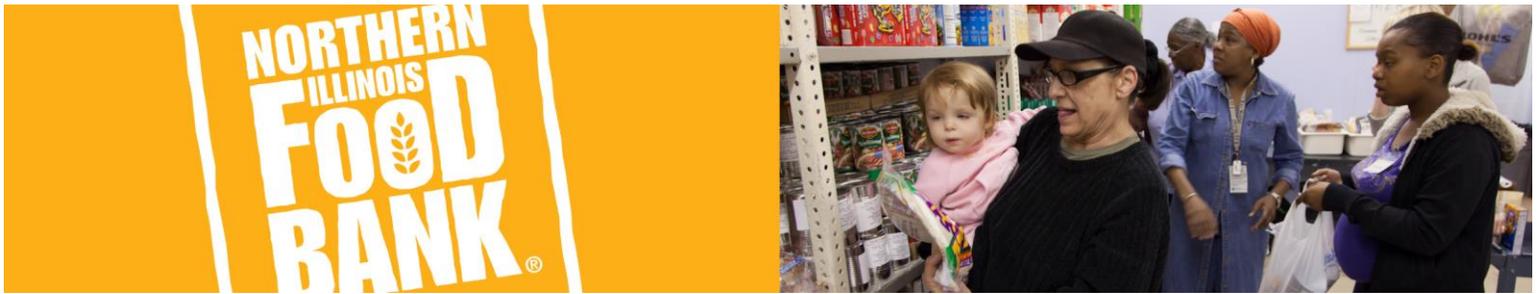
### References:

Just, D.R., B. Wansink and A. Hanks. Chefs move to schools. A pilot examination of how chef-created dishes can increase school lunch participation and fruit and vegetable intake. *Appetite*, forthcoming.

Pliner, P., Pelchat, M. & Grabski, M. (1993) Reduction of neophobia in humans by exposure to novel foods. *Appetite* 20, 111–123.

Sullivan, S.A. & Birch, L.L. (1990) Pass the sugar, pass the salt: experience dictates preference. *Dev. Psychol.* 26, 546–551. Wansink, B., C.R. Payne and J. North. Fine as North Dakota Wine: Sensory expectations and the intake of companion foods. *Physiology and Behavior* 90(2007):712-716.

Wansink, Brian and Payne, Collin R. and Painter, James E, What is Beautiful Tastes Good: Visuals Cues, Taste, and Willingness to Pay (July 29, 2014).



## The Power of Nudges: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Strategy:

**Front & center product placement, along with signage, that calls out to shoppers**

Placing produce in a prominent location where it is easily reached and seen can increase the selection of produce by more than 100% (Just and Wansink). This has been confirmed in multiple settings including grocery stores, bodegas and convenience stores. Just placing an item first in a line can increase takings by more than 11% relative to other places in the line. Finding a way to make healthy foods more prominent and attractive, for example, by placing produce in an attractive bowl or basket, goes a long way toward reminding clients of just how good that orange or apple can be. Placing a fruit item on two separate locations on the line can increase takings in some cases by more than 300%. The first time a fruit appears it may trigger a latent desire to eat the fruit, but by the time the individual realizes the desire they may have passed the item. But they will be ready the second time.



### References:

Just, David R., and Brian Wansink. "Smarter Lunchrooms: Using Behavioral Economics to Improve Meal Selection." *Choices* Vol. 24 No. 3 (2009).

Wansink, B. and D. R. Just Healthy Foods First: Students take the First Lunchroom Food 11% More Often than the Third. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 43(2011):S8.