 USING POINT OF DECISION MESSAGES TO INTERVENE ON COLLEGE STUDENTS’ EATING BEHAVIORS
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Introduction: An estimated 70 percent of food decisions are made as consumers shop. However, few studies have examined the impact of ‘point of decision’ messaging on food choice. According to the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, most college students do not consume the USDA recommended daily levels of fruits and vegetables.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of ‘point of decision’ messages on food selection of undergraduates in a dining hall setting. ‘Point of decision’ messages were developed from focus groups to promote fruit consumption. The objective of our study was to reduce cookie consumption and increase whole fruit consumption.

Methods: Point of decision messages were developed by the researchers and compiled into a 35 slide PowerPoint presentation with similar formatting and font. These messages were displayed on a computer screen at a ‘point of decision’ between the cookie and fruit stations during lunch for a total of 8 days. Baseline cookie and fruit consumption was measured 8 days prior to the intervention. A random sample of students completed surveys one week after the intervention.

Results: Approximately 8% fewer cookies and 4% more fruit (cookies: 8665 vs. 8011; fruit: 1454 vs. 1517) were consumed, respectively following the 8 days of ‘point of decision’ messages. A random sample of students’ surveyed one week post-intervention found that 62% of females and 50% of males noticed the messages. Approximately 16% of females and 17% of males reported modifying their food selection as a result of viewing the prompts. Furthermore, approximately 50% of females who reported modifying their food selection stated that they thought more about their food selection after viewing the messages, while 39% of males reported selecting a piece of fruit instead of a cookie. No significant mean differences were found between students in the dining hall pre-versus post-intervention.

Discussion: The ‘point of decision’ messaging successfully impacted food selection of students in the dining hall setting. Fruit consumption increased 4% and cookie consumption decreased by 8%. Further research in this area is needed to examine the potential impact of ‘point of decision’ messages on food choice among college students.