



Study: Food 'sin taxes' effective

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BUFFALO, N.Y., Feb. 25 (UPI) -- Taxing unhealthy foods reduces overall calories purchased, while cutting the proportion of fat and carbohydrates and increasing protein, U.S. researchers say.

The study, published in Psychological Science, finds subsidizing the prices of healthy food increased overall calories purchased without changing the nutritional value.

Leonard Epstein of the University of Buffalo said some states are beginning to impose "sin taxes" on fat and sugar to dissuade people from eating junk food, while others favor subsidies over punitive taxes as a way to encourage people to eat fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

The thought is that if you make it cheaper, people will eat more of it, more expensive and people will eat less, Epstein says.

Epstein and colleagues simulated a grocery store "stocked" with images of everything from bananas to nachos and had a group of volunteer mothers given laboratory "money" to shop for a week's groceries for the family. Each food item was priced the same as groceries at a real grocery nearby, and each food came with basic nutritional information.

First the mothers shopped using regular prices. Then the researchers raised the prices of unhealthy foods by 12.5 percent, and then by 25 percent, or they discounted the price of healthy foods comparably.

The study showed taxes were more effective in reducing calories purchased over subsidies, the researchers said.

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