



# Expanding food worlds of pre-adolescents

## Practical guidelines to support pre-adolescents in eating healthy outside home in a tempting food environment

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### BACKGROUND

This brochure outlines and explains recent research findings on pre-adolescents' eating habits and how the tempting food environment makes it challenging for them to make healthy food choices. It further provides guidelines and tips for teachers and parents to support pre-adolescents' healthy eating intrinsic motivation and how nudging can help to make healthy choices easier, more attractive and more normal.

### KEY FINDINGS

Pre-adolescence is a unique life stage with major developmental changes. Unhealthy eating and drinking habits are common among this age group. Pre-adolescents are able to make many independent food choices and frequently purchase foods.

Eating habits of pre-adolescents are influenced by multiple factors. Particularly the food environment at schools has a major impact on their eating habits as pre-adolescents consume a large part of their daily food intake at school. The current food environment at schools and surrounding schools is mainly unhealthy.

Creating a healthy school environment is crucial to support and promote healthy intake among pre-adolescents. Therefore, it is needed that schools should have high availability of healthy options, use school food policies and regulations and include programs on nutrition education. In addition, nudging could help to facilitate healthy intake, particularly through portion size enhancements and convenience enhancements.

Teachers and parents are encouraged to use supportive practices to promote pre-adolescents' intrinsic healthy eating motivation. For example, they can set a positive frame of reference and talk with pre-adolescents in a non-controlling way.





## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pre-adolescents' eating habits tend to deteriorate as they grow older. Considering that their poor eating habits are likely to continue into adulthood, it is important to support healthy eating during this developmental period.

Creating a healthy school food environment has been shown to help promoting healthy food and beverage choices. Behavioral nudges could be used to reduce daily energy intake from unhealthy foods by adjusting convenience and size enhancements. It is important for teachers and parents to consider pre-adolescents' values and healthy eating motivation when using supportive practices to promote healthy choices.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

van Nee, R. L., & van Kleef, E. (2022). Expanding food worlds of pre-adolescents: Practical guidelines to support pre-adolescents in eating healthy outside home in a tempting food environment.

