



Review

Slim by design: Menu strategies for promoting high-margin, healthy foods

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ABSTRACT

In a world of rising obesity, restaurants have become a regulatory target. One profitable but overlooked solution may be for restaurants to focus on menu engineering strategies that could increase sales of relatively healthier, high margin appetizers and entrées and help diners become slim by design. Recent lab and field research in consumer psychology and behavioral economics offer promising solutions that responsible restaurants can use to profitably guide their customers to healthier decisions by using the three-step menu engineering process of (1) shifting attention, (2) enhancing taste expectations, and (3) increasing perception of value. A review of these studies provides key implications that can both increase the healthfulness of what customers order along with the profits of the restaurant.

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1. Introduction

Given the parallel growth of obesity and the success of the restaurant industry (Riehle et al., 2011; Flegal et al., 2010; Saslow, 2010; Zwillich, 2006), many critics and public health officials have partially blamed obesity on their marketing practices and their food (Nestle, 2002; Brownell and Horgen, 2003; Zwillich, 2006). As a result, regulatory action had been proposed or enacted that would reduce portion size, eliminate drive-throughs, limit soft drink sizes, and to include calorie information on menus (Brownell and Frieden, 2009; Kuo et al., 2009; Wisdom et al., 2013). These threats put

restaurants in a position where they might become either reactive or defensive. Yet there may be a more promising solution to the obesity problem – restaurants could profitably help customers make healthier selections (Chandon and Wansink, 2012).

Most restaurants offer a wide range of healthier, lower-calorie options – salads, calorie-free drinks, vegetarian side dishes – that are also equally or more profitable than some of the more frequently ordered menu items, and these healthier items are becoming increasingly popular – especially those which are “slightly healthier” versions of favorite recipes (Wansink, 2014a,b). In contrast to fighting against regulations, an overlooked solution would be for restaurants to more effectively guide consumers toward these healthier options while still giving them a wide range of choices (Reynolds et al., 2005). For instance, instead of hoping the display of nutritional facts will change ordering behavior, principles of psychology and behavioral economics can be used to engineer

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<p>High-Margin Star (High-margin and Popular)</p> <p>People are willing to pay much more for this item than it costs to make. Restaurants want to, and usually can, sell a lot of these items. Example: barbeque.</p>	<p>High-Margin Puzzle (High-margin but unprofitable)</p> <p>People are not willing to pay much more than it costs to make. Restaurants want to turn puzzles into stars. Example: seafood stew.</p>
<p>Low-Margin Favorite (Low-margin but popular)</p> <p>There is little to no profit made on these items. Restaurants want to minimize the consumption of these items or lower their cost to make. Example: ribs.</p>	<p>Low-Margin Forgotten (Low-margin and unpopular)</p> <p>These items are difficult to sell and produce little profit when they do sell. Restaurants often consider eliminating dog items. Example: spam sandwich.</p>

Fig. 1. Categorizing healthy menu items to target healthy, high-margin items.

restaurant menus so they can guide customers to make healthier choices by (1) shifting attention, (2) enhancing taste expectations, and (3) increasing perception of value (Just and Wansink, 2013; Wansink et al., 2014).

Using recent lab studies in restaurants and cafeterias, this research integrates many overlooked options that are available to restaurants and which could provide a profitable solution to what some believe is an unwinnable political stalemate (Laroche et al., 2014). One key objective is to encourage these healthier choices in a way that does not create negative perceptions of taste (that are often associated with “health”) and to do so in a way that does not create compensatory behavior, such as overeating during that meal (Wansink and Hanks, 2013) or at a later time (Chandon and Wansink, 2007).

This paper is structured as follows. After illustrating a procedure as to how restaurants can target the healthy high margin items on their menu, principles of psychology and behavioral economics are used to show how menus can be altered to (1) draw more attention to these items, (2) enhance taste expectations, and (3) increase the perceived value of these items. Implications for restaurants and for future research in this area are then outlined in a way that can guide promising future action in this key area.

2. The role of psychology and behavioral economics in menu engineering

Menu psychology – the way in which people perceive, interpret, and react to different menu elements – is already being used by many restaurants to increase profits (Rapp, 2013; Arnoult, 1998; Feldman and Mahadevan, 2011; Panitz, 2000). In order to better leverage menu psychology to encourage the purchase of healthier, high-margin items, a key initial step is to determine which healthy menu items should be targeted. One approach adopted by Nessel (2013) is to view menu items in four different categories: High-margin Stars, High-margin Puzzles, Low-margin Favorites, and Forgotten Foods (Fig. 1). After dividing the menu items into these four categories, restaurants work to continue to promote healthy items that are high-margin stars, turn high-margin puzzles into high-margin stars, nudge customers from the low-margin favorites to high-margin stars, and eliminate the forgotten foods.

Accomplishing this transformation can be done in three broad ways. The first method is to use consumer psychology and behavioral economic principles to focus attention on the healthier high margin foods, instead of on the usual items to which a customer would generally default. The second is to use the notions of priming and expectation building to enhance taste expectations. The

third is to increase perceptions that the price of these items is fair and that their value is high (Poundstone, 2010).

2.1. Shifting attention

In consumer psychology, a key principle in shifting choice is to first ensure that a target item is in the initial consideration set (Kershaw, 2009; Burton et al., 2006). Restaurant patrons often do not consider all alternatives on a menu before making a choice. Instead, they may often lean toward default choices and not consider others (Wansink et al., 2012a,b). Even at an unfamiliar restaurant, one patron might skim the options looking for beef options that come with French fries, and another might immediately focus on pasta dishes. In both cases, healthier options would not even be noticed (Kolodinsky et al., 2009). They would not enter into an initial consideration set, and therefore would never be narrowed down to the two or three finalists in the choice set, let alone be ordered.

An initial step in engineering a restaurant menu to guide healthier choices is to make certain those healthier items are more convenient to see and be considered (Hanks et al., 2012a). This could occur by drawing more attention to particular items, or shifting attention away from default items by using salience builders such as using a contrasting font, font color, or font size, or by using pictures, illustrations, or icons if appropriate (Zwicky and Zwicky, 1980). Graphics can serve as powerful motivators for ordering (Poundstone, 2010). Lohse (1997) found that, when viewing advertisements in the yellow pages, consumers paid more attention to ads with graphics, and they also noticed color ads before ads without color and looked at them more often and for longer lengths of time. Similarly, in lab studies, participants viewed 42% more bold listings than plain listings supporting the basic claim that using fonts, colors, or boxes, can draw consumer attention by separating the items from the rest of the menu (Kershaw, 2009).

When more subtlety is needed, such as with fine dining restaurants, more low-key approaches can be used to direct attention. This can be in the form of a notation that suggests a Chef’s Recommendation, House Specialty, or a Traditional Favorite. Such labels suggest to consumers that these items are popular and are consumption norms. Consumption norms such as these have been shown to increase sales by 28% (Wansink et al., 2005) and increase how much they eat of that item by 13% (Wansink et al., 2007). In other cases, an entire section can be separately boxed off to bring attention to these items. Recent studies, however, warn against explicitly labeling these items as “Healthy.” For many people, the word “healthy” connotes that it is less flavorful or indulgent (Raghunathan et al., 2006; Horgen and Brownell, 2002). One possible option, using “traffic lights” and other signposts on menus, might have potential and could be less likely to backfire (Hammond et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2013; Hawley et al., 2012; Heathcote and Baic, 2011).

Recent findings by Dayan and Bar-Hillel (2011) add to the growing evidence that one’s consideration of an item is also influenced by its placement on the menu (Rapp et al., 2013). If the most expensive item on the menu – the anchor – is in a noticeable place, customers are primed to believe this high price-range is the norm (Poundstone, 2010). Restaurants should place other expensive, high-margin items around the anchor. However, these items should be sufficiently lower in price than the anchor to make them seem like deals. Efforts have been made to determine where the anchor and other high-margin items should be placed on a menu, and one predictable conclusion is that consumers scan menus similarly as to how they scan magazines (Yang et al., 2009). Therefore, the first section of the menu and the beginning of each section are great places to feature expensive items. Indeed, it has been found that items placed in the top and bottom of columns increased in

Table 1
Strategies for shifting attention and taste expectations toward healthy, high-margin menu items.

Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages	Menu items most appropriate for this strategy	Implementation suggestions	Type of strategy
Instead of a “Healthy Section,” call things “Light and Fresh” or similar taste-related phrases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't allow for the association of healthy = bad taste. The word “fresh” has a positive connotation that is often associated with good quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People may eat more because they believe the item to be healthier or not as filling. People may skip a “light” section all together and go for a heavier entree. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green summer salads. Vegetable and bean recipes. Whole grain and vegetable items. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider accompanying the “light and fresh” title with a graphic. Place this section near the beginning of the menu so that, if reading the menu like a book, it will be one of the first things the customer reads. 	Influences expectations about taste
Descriptive words for healthy items. For example, “Succulent Italian Seafood Fillet” sells 28% more than “seafood salad.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better descriptions increase sales no matter what the healthy item. Descriptions increase appeal and may lead to more overall purchases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much description throughout the menu can be overwhelming. Descriptions that are too long for an individual item may encourage people to skip those items all together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items that may seem boring on their own. Items that are high-margin but generate low interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use descriptive words for the healthiest and highest-margin menu items. Avoid adding unnecessary descriptors to already appealing menu options. Use words that apply to taste sensations. 	Influences expectations about taste
Place healthy items in the four corners of the menu.	People's natural attention will scan the four corners of menu pages. Healthy corners will create a frame of nutrition for consumers.	Restaurants must find healthy appetizers and desserts (often in two of the four menu corners), which could be difficult. If people order a healthy appetizer, they may feel entitled to an unhealthy entree.	Healthy dessert option: cheese and fruit. Healthy appetizer option: fresh vegetables and dip.	Make the corners not only the healthiest, but also the highest-margin. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There must be enough healthy items to spread around the menu. 	Draws on natural attention
Section off “House Favorites” that are healthy. In any section such as this, make sure the healthier items are listed first.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People's natural attention will guide them to the first items in sections. Initial healthy items will set a nutritious precedent for the rest of the section. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurants may want to place their highest-margin items first, which could be unhealthy. Restaurants must find healthy appetizers and desserts (often at beginning and ends of menus), which are often not nutritious. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy dessert option: strawberry frozen yogurt. Healthy appetizer option: cherry tomatoes filled with creamy pesto cheese. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the first item in a section not only the healthiest, but also the highest-margin. There should be more than one healthy option in each section. 	Draws on natural attention
Use logos, icons, recommendations or photo to draw attention to targeted item.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draws attention to item(s) of choice. Adds esthetic appeal to menu as a whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many icons can look cheap. Too many icons can be busy and overwhelming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use for healthy, high-margin items like shrimp gumbo. Use for items whose names do not do them justice like vegetable soup. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beware using healthy logos, which can signal bad taste. Use an icon closely related to object. Do not use more than one icon per item. 	Draws on artificial attention
Place healthy high-margin items in bolded/colored boxes, or use bolded/colored words to draw attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds dimension and interest to the menu. These changes are easy and inexpensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much added detail can appear cluttered and unorganized. Using too many eye-catching devices can confuse a customer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items that may seem boring on their own. Items that are high-margin but generate low interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use sparingly to avoid a chaotic looking menu. Make sure the colors and boxes blend in with the theme of the restaurant to maintain continuity. 	Draws on artificial attention

sales by 25% (Dayan and Bar-Hillel, 2011). There is also evidence for possible “sour spots” on the bottom left side of menus where customers seldom look (Yang et al., 2009). Such places have been referred to as “Menu Siberia” and may be where low-margin items should be featured (Poundstone, 2010). The basic use of these techniques can be seen in Table 1, which shows how a wide range of these strategies can be used to promote the profitable selection of healthier menu items.

Recent studies have shown that the first foods customers see or select influences what they select after that. These first foods are called trigger foods, and one study showed that when lunch goers were exposed to healthy appetizers first (fruit versus fruit cocktail), they were 8% more likely to choose a healthy entrée regardless of whether they selected the appetizer or not (Hanks et al., 2012b). A second in a breakfast buffet showed that the first three items a

person encountered in the buffet ended up comprising 68% of all the total foods they took, and the first item a person encountered (fresh cut fruit versus cheesy eggs) set the tone for the subsequent items they selected (Wansink and Hanks, 2013). Engineering a menu so that the first foods a person sees or selects are healthy can set the tone for their entire meal.

2.2. Enhancing taste expectations

Restaurants use menu psychology in a number of ways to nudge customers toward ordering their most profitable items (Kershaw, 2009). Once a menu item is considered by a customer, it is believed they make a quick evaluation whether it is worth further consideration. One key attribute how a customer will imagine it will taste. Recent studies have shown that one's interpretation of a taste

experience can be very subjective (Tuorila and Cardello, 2002; Cardello and Sawyer, 1992). For instance, how a menu item is named or described on a menu has been shown to increase sales of those items by 27% (Wansink et al., 2001). That is, people believed that a seafood filet tasted significantly better when named “Succulent Italian Seafood Filet” than when simply named “Seafood Filet.” This even works for young children. When vegetables were given descriptive names in elementary school lunchrooms (such as X-ray Vision Carrots), selection increased 18% and remained stable for the three month duration of the study (Wansink et al., 2012a,b).

The name of a food provides a cue as to what might be expected from the taste. While we might believe that we know what we like, we appear to be surprisingly influenced by such cues. Past work has shown descriptive names improved sales and improved expectations related to the food and to the restaurant (Wansink et al., 2001). When in restaurants, people scan menus looking for benefits they believe will satisfy their expectations at that point in time. Consider how people evaluate “Grandma’s homemade chocolate pudding.” If they associate Grandma’s cooking as being flavorful, they may combine their beliefs about the characteristics of Grandma’s cooking (flavorful) with the characteristics of chocolate pudding (sweet and smooth). These expectations can establish an affect state (Mela, 1999) that may bias their taste evaluation. Unless these expectations are grossly disconfirmed (Richardson et al., 1994), lab studies show that their post-consumption evaluation seems to generally be assimilated with prior expectations. If one thinks it will taste good, it probably will taste good. If one thinks it will taste bad, it probably will taste bad.

As long as the foods are not too different (worse) than what was expected, these favorable associations appear to form an attitude and sensory halo. This resulting attitude halo not only favorably influences how a person thinks a food looks and tastes, but it might also influence estimations of how caloric the product is and how satisfying and satiating it was (cf. Shide and Rolls, 1995). This might be expected if descriptive names or labels encourage one to think more about the hedonic (taste-related) aspects of the food and less about its utilitarian aspects (such as it is being reasonably priced). By providing a more rich, hedonic stimulus (in the form of a descriptive food name), one’s thoughts and evaluations may be reflected in a similar direction. In short, we believe that favorably descriptive menu names can increase sensory perceptions of appearance and taste just as they have been shown to influence food sales, restaurant attitudes, and repurchase intentions (Wansink et al., 2007).

To determine what types of descriptions are most common in restaurants, we analyzed 373 descriptive menu items that were taken from a convenience sample of casual dining chains and fine dining restaurants from around the country (Wansink et al., 2001). While these were not specifically words used to describe healthier foods, they may serve as a useful guide in engineering taste expectations for healthier, high-margin target foods. These words generally fell into four categories:

1. *Sensory names:* Describing the texture, taste, smell, and mouth feel of the menu item raises our taste expectations. Pastry chefs are the masters of these by using names like Velvety Chocolate Mousse, but a great main menu also has Crispy Snow Peas, Pillow Handmade Gnocchi, Fork-tender Beef Stew.
2. *Geographic names:* Words that create an image or ideology of a geographic area associated with the food. Think Iowa Farm-raised Pork Chops, Southwestern Tex-Mex Salad, Carolina Mustard Barbecue, or Georgia Peach Tart.
3. *Nostalgic names:* Alluding to the past can trigger happy wholesome associations of tradition, family, and national origin. Think Old-style Manicotti, Oktoberfest Red Cabbage, and Grandma’s Chicken Dumplings, or words like Classic or House Favorite.

4. *Brand names:* Cross-promotions are catching on fast in the chain restaurant world. They tell us, “If you love the brand, you’ll love this menu item.” That’s why we can buy Jack Daniels® BBQ Ribs, and Twix® Blizzards. For the high-end restaurants, this translates into Niman Ranch pork loin or a Kobe beef kabob.

After one’s taste expectation of a food has been enhanced, it can move from consideration into one’s final choice set – the two or three final menu items one compares before ordering. It is usually not until this point that price becomes weighed in the equation, and it is done in the form of how price influences a diner’s perception of an item’s value (Mueller, 1997).

2.3. Increasing perception of value

While price is a critical factor in the fast food (or quick service) restaurant segment, it can be slightly less important in non-fast food restaurants (Kasdan, 1996). In these arenas, restaurants strive to de-emphasize the price and nudge customers to spend top dollar by using several tactics. Poundstone (2010) suggests avoiding listing prices in a straight column because this invites people to scan the price list for less expensive items. He also advises against the use of leader dots between the food items and their prices, because both design elements draw unnecessary attention to the cost. However, one study found that manipulations of price location did not result in significant average-check-amount differences (Wiesman, 2006). Again, the lack of results may have been confounded because this restaurant frequently made changes that may have gone unnoticed.

One way these pricing changes could have been made more significant is by not only placing menu prices at the end of the item descriptions, as Rapp (2013) did, but also by adjusting prices to include as few numerals as possible. One study found that listing a price of \$14 will bring more sales than listing a price as \$14.00, because fewer numbers signal a lower price (Naipaul and Parsa, 2001). While it is often discouraged to use the “\$” sign and the word “dollars” (they draw attention to the price – Kershaw, 2009), a separate study found that guests given the numeral-only menu spent significantly more than those who received a menu with prices written out in words or menus showing a dollar sign (Yang et al., 2009). But if a restaurant decides to use decimals and cents, Naipaul and Parsa (2001) show that the low-end of a given market uses the number 9 as the rightmost digit of a price (\$4.99) while those operating in the high-end of a given market use the number 0 (\$25.00). Therefore, ending in the digit 9 indicates great value while the digit 0 indicates high quality (Naipaul and Parsa, 2001).

Finally, the more food that comes with a meal, the harder it is to work out what you are spending on each item (Poundstone, 2010). Whereas \$30 for four scallops may be considered expensive, \$30 for four scallops, an inexpensive vegetable dish, and an inexpensive starch is more appealing to the customer and more profitable to the restaurant. This can also be accomplished by inflating the cost of dinners for two. People do not often take the time to divide out the cost and estimate whether it is a reasonable price for an individual meal (Poundstone, 2010).

Restaurants use, or at least have the potential to use, numerous strategies to get customers to order certain items from a menu. Tactics for shifting attention and de-emphasizing price are used to make restaurants more profitable. With a few revisions, these tactics can be converted into win-win strategies that have the potential to not only make restaurants more profitable but patrons healthier (Wansink, 2014a,b). Fig. 2 illustrates how some of the prior techniques can specifically be used to redesign an existing menu to increase the sale of healthy, high-profit items.

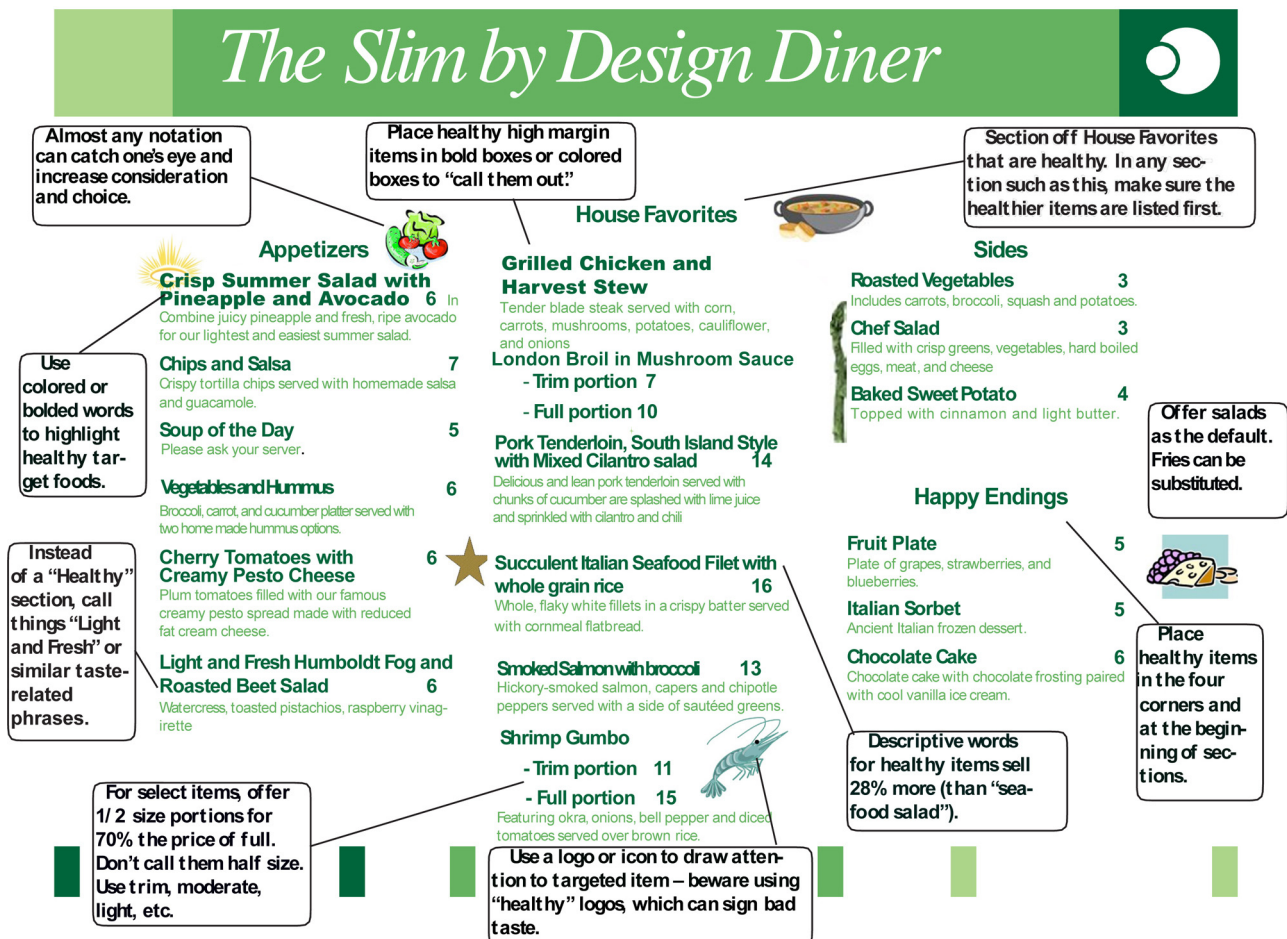


Fig. 2. A menu designed to drive profit and promote healthy eating.

3. Menu psychology and implications for restaurateurs

An increasing amount of research in different fields suggest promising, unexplored changes the restaurant industry could make on signage, menu boards, and menus to guide consumers to purchase more of the healthier, high margin items they might offer. These findings are coming from a wide range of contexts – lab studies, field studies, restaurant sales studies, and cafeteria studies (Hanks et al., 2013) – and provide encouraging direction. They hold promise for helping responsible restaurants to help guide healthier decisions by using the three-step menu engineering process of (1) shifting attention, (2) enhancing taste expectations, and (3) increasing perception of value. There are several steps restaurants can take for health-supporting win-win strategies:

1. Survey menu and identify healthy, high-margin items by using the spreadsheet displayed below. In order to sell more of these items, refer to Fig. 1 and pick which menu strategies will work best for promoting the various menu items selected.
2. Survey menu and identify unhealthy, low-margin items by using the spreadsheet displayed below. In order to sell less of these items, refer to Table 2, and remove any tactics that may draw attention to them.
3. Conduct a short-run test to collect a small amount of qualitative research. Perhaps print out a limited number of modified menus and use the menu to survey a small sample group. Note what parts of the menu could be improved further.
4. Fix any problems with the previous menu. Experiment with a small-scale implementation. Use the revised menu for a limited

number of nights or weeks. Use the spreadsheet below to track changes in sales.

5. Finalize the menu and begin a large-scale implementation. Continue to track changes in sales.
6. When the experimentation period is over, use the spreadsheet below to analyze the impact of the menu changes. Observe the changes in profit and take note of the amount and type of food being sold. The goal is to increase profit, increase the number of high-margin items being sold, and decrease the number of low-margin items being sold. See if the restaurant achieved its goals.

4. Limitations and future research

While there are many aspects of menu psychology, there are more areas of menu design that may have an impact on consumer decision-making that have yet to be examined. One important set of limitations is that some of the suggestions made in this article have been discovered in lab studies but have not yet been investigated or corroborated with actual sales in restaurants. Four promising areas are with (1) menu signals that are physical and not alpha-numeric, (2) children's menus, and (3) restaurant ambience.

First, there are many aspects of the physical menu that may subconsciously prime consumers with certain health expectations. People may think more nutritiously if a menu is tall and narrow as opposed to short and wide. The state of the menu may also impact decision-making. A stained or peeling menu cover may be associated with low-quality restaurants thus priming people to think

Table 2
Future research for promoting healthy, high-margin menu items.

Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages	Menu items most appropriate for this strategy	Implementation suggestions	Type of strategy
Offer 1/2-size portions for 70% of the price for the full size.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many customers appreciate the option to eat smaller portions. Allows for a higher price-to-portion ratio. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers may want 1/2-size portions for all menu items. Customers may order the 1/2-size version solely because it is less expensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items that often have very large serving sizes such as a burrito or a popular sampler platter. Items that do not have many food groups in them. Then, someone can order the 1/2-size portion and order a vegetable or carbohydrate on the side. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not call them half size. Use trim, moderate, light, etc. instead. Do not offer this option on all menu items. Instead, select a few items that would be simple for the kitchen to produce and popular enough to make the extra effort worth it. 	One that offers different consumer options.
Offer salads as the default with most menu items. Fries can be substituted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurants can sell less of cheap, unhealthy food. People eat healthier without having to make the decision to eat healthier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the type of lettuce, salads can be expensive to serve. People may choose the fries over the salad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meals where meat is the main portion of the dish such as steaks, cheeseburgers, or chicken tenders. Meals where a starch is the main portion of the dish such as pasta or potatoes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the salad listed with the menu item. Ask the server to not mention the option to substitute fries. Offer several options for the default salad or salad dressing. 	One that offers different consumer options.

about, and therefore order less healthy food. Further, having a separate menu for drinks and desserts may encourage customers to purchase them because the novelty of a second menu heightens interest. However, separate menus could conversely discourage the purchase of drinks and desserts because these items are not included in the original scan of the dinner menu.

A second area that has been largely ignored is the psychology of children's menus. There is little to no research on the impact of having a separate menu for children and having it included in the adult menu. Additionally, research may find that there is no such thing as too many graphics on children's menu. Games, coloring books, and puzzles seem to be abundant in many children's menus, but do they influence decision-making? Research could further pursue how the elements of children's menu influence healthy decisions and whether the children or their parents make these decisions. One area of special potential is providing nutrition education or discussion topics on the boxes or containers of children's meals.

Third, in addition to menus, there are other potential hidden drivers of choice behavior that are in the ambience of the restaurant. There are several other aspects of restaurant ambience that may encourage people to make better food choices. For example, having a table tent of healthy foods as opposed to desserts and drinks or having pictures on the walls related to healthy food may prime customers to be more health-conscious when ordering. People may also think more nutritiously if they feel more connected with the natural environment. Adding plants to the restaurant scene, or making the lighting more natural through windows or natural light bulbs (daylight lamps) could spark a desire for leafy greens and fresh food. This desire could also arise by having more tables face the outdoors. In addition, it has been found that when fast food restaurants turned down both the sound level and the light level, patrons ate 18% less of their food, but rated both the restaurant and the food as being more favorable (Wansink and van Ittersum, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Despite America's steadily rising obesity rate, restaurants do not have to be part of the problem. In fact, they can serve as part of the solution. Further, consumers do not necessarily need in-depth nutritional information to make healthier choices in restaurants.

Rather, healthier choices can be achieved by guiding people by (1) shifting attention, (2) enhancing taste expectations, and (3) increasing perception of value. By using menu psychology, restaurants can promote healthy, high-margin items with win-win strategies to make dining out the most profitable, pleasurable, and nutritious it can be.

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