

Soda on Display: A Pilot Study of Sugary Drink Placement and Promotion in Grocery Stores in the Washington, DC Area

Background

Each year, food and beverage manufacturers spend large amounts of money to market their products, usually processed and packaged, in grocery stores and supermarkets.¹ As a result, unhealthy food and beverages appear in prominent store locations like checkout aisles and endcaps, capturing shoppers' attention with flashy displays and two-for-one deals.²

Sugar-sweetened beverages—the top source of added sugar in Americans' diets³—are frequently marketed in grocery stores. This pilot study investigated the placement and promotion of sugary drinks across 16 grocery stores in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The purpose of the pilot study was to understand how many times shoppers can encounter sugary drink placements or promotions in a grocery store.

Results

Across all 16 stores in the D.C. metropolitan area, sugar-sweetened beverages appeared in an average of 30 locations and had nine price promotions within each grocery store. Sugary drinks most often appeared on endcaps (27.6 percent of sugary drink displays), followed by center aisles (24.0 percent), checkout aisles (19.4 percent), and other freestanding displays (17.5 percent). Promotions were most often found on endcaps; more than half of endcaps with sugary drinks had price promotions.

Overall, the number of sugary drink placements and promotions increased with store size. In terms of placement, small stores tended to prioritize perimeter and center aisles, and mid-sized and large stores had a roughly equal distribution across endcaps, checkout, perimeter and center aisles. Although the sample size was limited, there were no significant differences between stores in lower- and higher-income wards with respect to either the number of placements or promotions.

Recommendations

- Retailers should limit the placement and promotion of sugary drinks by:
 - Replacing them with healthier alternatives, such as water and seltzer,
 - Limiting the placement of sugary drinks to a designated soda aisle,
 - Eliminating manufacturer coupons that enable price promotions for sugary drinks.

¹ Rivlin G, Almy J, Wootan M. Rigged: Supermarket Shelves for Sale. The Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2016. https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/CSPI_Rigged_4_small.pdf. Accessed September 4, 2019.

² *Ibid.*

³ Drewnowski A, Rehm CD. Consumption of added sugars among US children and adults by food purchase location and food source. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2014;100(3):901–907. This article's financial disclosure states that Drewnowski has received grants, honoraria, and consulting fees from numerous food and beverage companies and other commercial and nonprofit entities with interests in nutritive and nonnutritive sweeteners.

- Advocates should use the assessment tool created for this report to evaluate in-store marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages in their communities. They should use the findings of these assessments to push for state and local policies that limit the placement and promotion of sugary drinks.
- Researchers should conduct similar assessments with larger sample sizes across a broader geographic region to better understand the scope of sugary drink marketing and the degree of variation across stores and store locations. Future research should also evaluate the prevalence of placements and promotions for other product categories, such as candy and sweetened baked goods.

The full report can be found [here](#).

For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspinet.org.

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