

## Meijer Falls Short on Healthy Commitment at Checkout

Meijer's slogan is "Higher Standards, Lower Prices." When it comes to its checkout, it is more like "Higher Sugar, Lower Nourishment."

Meijer states that offering "products and services to help our customers lead healthier lives" is a core value.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Meijer's checkout aisles do not reflect this. Stacked high next to the express registers at Meijer grocery stores are 32-ounce cups, pushing a last-ditch sugar binge on shoppers. Studies show that checkout aisles are typically filled with unhealthy options like candy, energy bars, chips, cookies, and coolers of sugary drinks, but few stores go as far as placing a freestanding soda station between customers and the exit.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1.** A sugar-sweetened beverage filling station near checkout



**Figure 2.** Unhealthy assortment at checkout

In July 2018, the NorthWest Initiative, Capital Area Health Alliance, Capital Area Food Council, Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), and grassroots advocates in Michigan launched a campaign asking Meijer, the seventh largest grocery store in the country, for healthy checkout aisles.

Candy, sugary drinks, and salty snacks typically dominate checkout. Food manufacturers pay hefty fees to place products in front of captive customers waiting to pay.<sup>3</sup> While customers can choose to avoid the candy and soda aisles, they cannot avoid them at checkout. Impulse purchases from checkout can add extra calories to customers' diets that contribute to weight gain; individuals rarely offset snack calories by consuming fewer calories at later meals.<sup>4,5</sup>

### Assessing Meijer Checkout Options

Local health professionals and community members assessed the 6,769 checkout facings in 25 standard, express, and self-checkout aisles across 6 Meijer stores in Lansing and Grand Rapids, Michigan.<sup>a</sup> Assessors categorized food and beverage options as “healthier” or “unhealthy” using [model nutrition standards for checkout](#) based on food and nutrition standards the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity developed.<sup>6</sup> Healthier foods include fruits, vegetables, granola bars, and nuts. Unhealthy foods include candy, energy bars, chips, cookies, cakes, and dried meat.<sup>b</sup> Full-calorie sodas and energy and sport drinks, as well as sweetened water, fruit drinks, tea, and coffee drinks qualify as unhealthy. Healthier beverage options include water, diet or low-calorie beverages, and 100% juice (without added sweeteners).

### An Illusion of Choice

Meijer offers different flavors and varieties at checkout, but the underlying options are limited—almost all were candy, chips, and sugary drinks. Sixty-four percent of food options at checkout were unhealthy. Candy was the most prevalent food, followed by chips, energy bars, cookies, and dried meat.

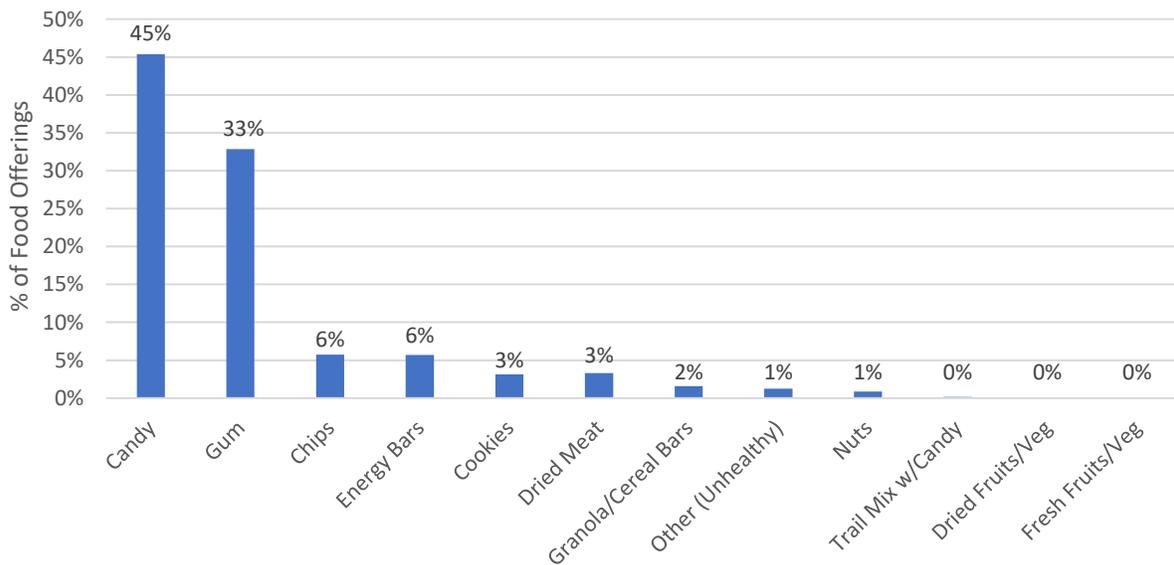


Figure 3. Food options at checkout

In contrast, less than three percent of food items qualified as healthier options such as sunflower seeds or granola bars, and no checkout aisles offered fruits or vegetables.

<sup>a</sup> A facing refers to the display of a single product and not to products stacked behind.

<sup>b</sup> This assessment excludes gum, because we did not differentiate between sugar (which would qualify as unhealthy) and sugar-free gum during data collection.

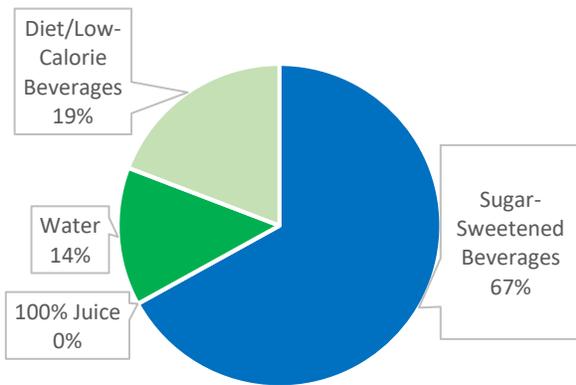


Figure 4. Beverage options at checkout

Two-thirds of beverage options at Meijer checkout were sugar-sweetened drinks such as full-calorie soda, energy drinks, sweetened coffee, sweet tea, and fruit drinks. Express checkout aisles offered 32-ounce cups for customers to fill with fountain soda or Ices as they exited checkout (see Figures 1 and 6). Meijer commonly cross-promoted sugar-sweetened beverages with chips, as shown in below in Figure 5. The number of unhealthy beverages displayed at checkout was nearly five times the number of water bottles displayed, and no checkout aisles offered juice without added sugar.

### Rethinking Checkout

Consumer preferences are changing. According to a recent survey by Label Insight, 67 percent of Americans prioritize purchasing healthy food, and more than half of women are looking to reduce their sugar intake.<sup>7</sup> In another national poll:

- Nearly all respondents (93 percent) reported that the availability of affordable, healthy food in supermarkets is important to Americans' health;
- The majority (79 percent) responded that supermarkets should do more to make it easier for people to eat healthfully;
- Half of adults (51 percent) said they recently purchased candy or soda at checkout, but 76 percent regretted doing so;
- Eighty percent of parents said they would regularly use healthy checkout aisles if stores offered them; and
- Three-quarters of parents reported finding it hard to shop at grocery stores with children because there is so much junk food.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 5. Cross-promotion of soda and chips

In response to changing consumer preferences, retailers are shifting the mix of checkout options in a healthier direction. [Aldi announced a plan](#) in 2016 to have healthy checkout aisles at its 1,500 stores; [CVS also announced](#) it would reduce shelf space for soda and unhealthy foods to make room for healthier foods and non-food items. Raley's supermarkets is offering "Better for You" check stands in their 121 locations; the retailer plans to strengthen nutrition standards for these lanes in 2018.

"Instead of having to navigate countless checkout aisles filled with junk food, we're asking Meijer to create lanes with healthier options that provide parents with more opportunities to, every once in a while, say 'yes' to snacks we can feel good about."  
– Jane Kramer, Michigan mother and healthy checkout advocate

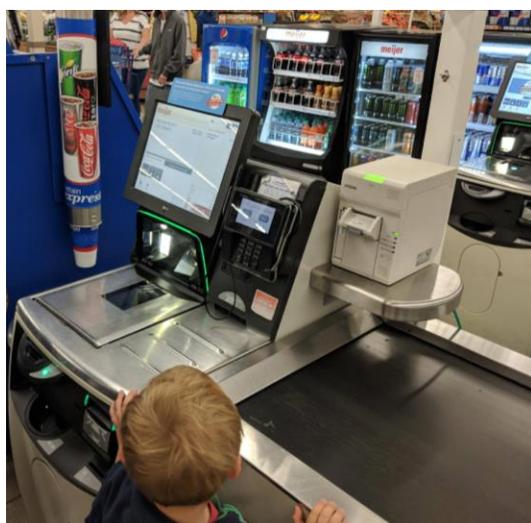


Figure 6. 32-ounce cups at checkout

Meijer, however, has made no public commitment to offer healthier items at checkout, despite repeated requests from customers. In 2016, a mom from Bath Township, MI [petitioned Meijer](#) for healthy checkout aisles. The petition garnered more than 1,500 signatures and was featured on Good Morning America. At that time, Meijer said they would consider adding more healthy products to their checkout aisles, but those changes never came.

In August 2018, grassroots advocates will deliver a second petition to Meijer headquarters with more than 2,000 customer signatures asking for healthy checkout. This presents yet another opportunity for Meijer to help customers lead healthier lives by promoting healthier food and drink options in checkout aisles.

**For more information on healthy retail opportunities, contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at [policy@cspinet.org](mailto:policy@cspinet.org).**

<sup>1</sup> Meijer Grocery Store. Meijer Supplier Guide. Grand Rapids, MI: Meijer Grocery Store, 2017. <https://www.meijervendornet.com/Documents/MEIJER%20SUPPLIER%20GUIDE.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Fielding-Singh P, Almy J, Wootan MG. *Sugar Overload: Retail Checkout Promotes Obesity*. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2014. <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/sugarovertload.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Mogelonsky M. Keep candy in the aisles. *Am Demographics*. 1998;20:32.

<sup>4</sup> Kerver JM, Yang EL, Obayashi S, Biacchi L, Song Wo. Meal and snack patterns are associated with dietary intake of energy and nutrients in US adults. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2006;106:46-53.

<sup>5</sup> Levitsky DA. The non-regulation of food intake in humans: hope for reversing the epidemic of obesity. *Physiol Behavior*. 2005;86:623-632.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. *Model Nutrition Standards for Checkout*. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2016. <https://cspinet.org/protecting-our-health/nutrition/model-nutrition-standards-checkout>.

<sup>7</sup> New Hope Network. *What Food Shoppers Want in 2018*. Boulder, CO: New Hope Network, 2018. <https://www.newhope.com/products-and-trends/what-food-shoppers-want-2018>.

<sup>8</sup> Checkout Polling: Online Survey of 1,024 adults. Princeton, NJ: Caravan ORC International, December 1–4, 2016. <https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/hco-poll-fact-sheet.pdf>.