

- A partnership of public health researchers across the five universities in North East England
- Working with policy makers and practice partners to improve health and wellbeing and tackle inequalities
- A founding member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR)

# Foodscapes: how can we make takeaway food healthier?

Reducing obesity needs a change in our food environment and in what and how we eat. The Foodscape study responded to this challenge by identifying effective interventions to change the meals offered by takeaways by testing them in the real world and evaluating their potential for improving diets and reducing obesity.

Researchers from Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, and from the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR) collaborated with food businesses, their customers, and professionals working on healthy diets to research, identify, develop and test small scale interventions.

A review of the national and international evidence showed that there was little to indicate that two of the most common interventions - calorie labelling and rewarding food-outlets with healthy eating accreditation - were effective.

A mapping and evidence exercise of interventions in England found that a large number of initiatives targeting takeaway food are being delivered but we need more information on their effectiveness. Businesses were positive about interventions that came at no extra cost and did not change customer perceived value, taste or portion size.

Analysis of the UK Government National Diet and Nutrition Survey showed that 20-25% of people ate takeaways at home at least once-a-week and the most common consumers were young adults. People who regularly ate takeaways, at least weekly, were linked with a higher daily energy intake than those that had a takeaway rarely. Regular consumption of takeaways disproportionately impacted on the daily energy intake of children from less affluent households.

Interviews with those delivering interventions to increase healthier food choices in independent food-outlets identified that takeaways were particularly challenging but worthwhile

targets. This qualitative work also revealed that interventions should be tailored to takeaway cuisine type, take account of the business motive for profit and engage suppliers.

## Interventions and key findings

Based on the available evidence, the study team developed the following interventions:

- 1) *A hole lot of salt*: comparing the salt content of meals served by takeaways using a modified five hole salt shaker, developed by Gateshead Council, with the traditional seventeen hole salt shaker.  
⇒ The five hole shaker delivered 66% less salt than the seventeen hole salt shaker under laboratory conditions. In shops, the reduced hole salt shaker delivered less salt (per each 100g of a meal) than the seventeen hole shaker.
- 2) *Take it away*: local authority, Redcar & Cleveland Council, led interactive Healthy Takeaway Masterclass with owners and staff from 18 takeaways. Traders were provided with a range of nutritional improvement opportunities and asked to pledge to provide at least one healthier food option.  
⇒ Each takeaway business attending the training made at least one pledge, and 15 reported achieving this target. The most popular changes required minimal effort and cost, e.g. reducing sugar or salt, or using semi-skimmed instead of whole milk. The research concluded that the intervention was feasible, but uptake on the training was low (about 10%).
- 3) *More than enough on our plates*: intervention led by supplier, Henry Colbeck, to offer and promote smaller portion meals in fish and chip shops.  
⇒ The smaller portion meals were well received by traders and customers. As a result, subsequent 'Lite-BITE', small portion meal boxes, were developed by the supplier, Henry Colbeck. In 2017, the supplier sold 552,300 of these boxes to 253 shops.

## Policy relevance and implications

- Internationally there is a poor evidence base around what interventions work in the out-of-home food setting.
- In England, many local authorities were delivering interventions or schemes within the out-of-home food environment. Most of these were award type schemes but there was little evaluation of their impact.
- Additional work will be required to substantially reduce the salt content of takeaway food.
- Further training has been delivered by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council (five sessions) with more planned and opportunities to build on the findings.
- There is a need to define, and potentially standardise, smaller portion meals. Packaging will play a clear role and while dependent on pricing, the acceptability of smaller portion meals to both traders and customers shows promise.
- Interventions may be more effective if tailored and targeted at adults under 30 years and at younger people to help children and adolescents to avoid becoming frequent consumers of out-of-home food.

*“If adapted on a large scale, these interventions have the potential to increase choice and make a difference to what we all eat”*

Professor Ashley Adamson, project lead

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

Researchers from Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, collaborated with food businesses, their customers, and professionals working on healthy diets to research, identify, develop and test small scale interventions for their potential to improve diets and reduce obesity.

The work involved Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, Newcastle and Teesside Universities. It was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (SPHR).

Visit the Fuse Youtube channel to watch our videos about this research: [www.youtube.com/user/FuseOnline](http://www.youtube.com/user/FuseOnline)

A list of outputs from the Foodscape study can be found on the website of the NIHR School for Public Health Research: <https://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/research/foodscape>

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Foodscape Research Team  
Email: [amelia.lake@tees.ac.uk](mailto:amelia.lake@tees.ac.uk)

Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, is a collaboration of the 5 North East Universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland & Teesside.

Website: [fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs](http://fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs)  
Blog: [fuseopenscienceblog.blogspot.co.uk](http://fuseopenscienceblog.blogspot.co.uk)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/fuseonline](https://facebook.com/fuseonline)  
Twitter: @fuse\_online  
Email: [fuse@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:fuse@newcastle.ac.uk)  
Telephone: +44 (0)191 208 7296

