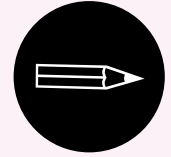


# Viewpoint



## ‘Health nudge doesn’t always work’

Customers in six Coop supermarkets were subjected for one year to nudges aimed at getting them to buy healthier food. Healthy products were displayed at eye level or in easy-to-reach places. The trial by researchers at Amsterdam UMC had little effect. ‘Supermarket nudges are not effective’ were the media headlines. Emely de Vet (EV) and Merije van Rookhuijzen (MR), who study nudges in the Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles group, are more nuanced. **EV:** ‘It was a good study but to conclude nudging doesn’t work would be going too far.

It is just one study with a few nudges in an unhealthy environment. Eight out of ten products in the supermarket are not on the recommended balanced diet. It’s difficult to measure the effect of small nudges in such a complex context.’ **MR:** ‘They also don’t seem to have used one of the most effective nudges, the default nudge, where you change the default option. An example would be offering water as the default option in a menu, or fruit as the default dessert. In Austria, Burger King changed the defaults in July. All the

burgers were vegetarian unless you asked specifically for meat. It is harder to implement the default nudge in a supermarket.’

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### ‘A nudge is a drop in the ocean, but better than no drop at all’

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**EV:** ‘Health nudges won’t necessarily work everywhere. Customers make impulse purchases at the cash till because they want something unhealthy. Apples wouldn’t work.’

**MR:** ‘In the trial, healthy

products were placed next to unhealthy products, both competing for attention.’

**EV:** ‘The availability of unhealthy food needs to be tackled more systematically. A nudge is a drop in the ocean, but better than no drop at all.’

**MR:** ‘It depends too on the situation. I studied nudges in people’s homes. That is where most food is consumed and the environment is more clearly delimited than in a supermarket. It turned out people could give themselves effective nudges, for example by putting fruit on their desk or at eye level in the fridge.’ ss