



# Paying the Price

## Executive Summary

New evidence on the link between price promotions, purchasing of less healthy food and drink, and overweight and obesity in Great Britain

March 2019

Together we will beat cancer



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# Executive Summary

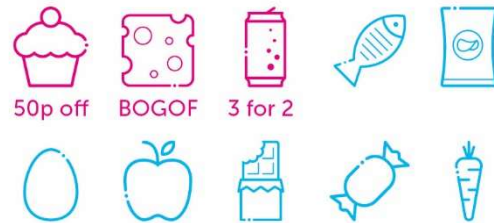
Overweight and obesity is the second leading preventable cause of cancer in the UK<sup>1</sup>, and is predicted to overtake smoking as the leading cause of cancer in women in around 25 years<sup>2</sup>. It is linked to at least 13 types of cancer, including bowel and breast, which are amongst the most common, and oesophageal and pancreatic, which are amongst the most difficult to treat<sup>1</sup>. Each year, it is estimated that overweight and obesity costs £5.1bn to the NHS<sup>3</sup> and £27bn to the wider UK economy<sup>4</sup>.

Tackling this public health crisis requires a whole systems approach to improve the food environment and make the healthy choice the easy choice. National, population-level measures are a vital part of reducing obesity rates and the associated health inequalities.

The UK and devolved governments have published strategies to reduce obesity which include proposals to restrict location and volume-based price promotions on less healthy foods<sup>5-7</sup>. As evidence shows that less healthy foods are largely purchased on price promotion, and that promotions tend to increase the amount consumed, this may be an effective measure to reduce obesity<sup>8,9</sup>.

This report uses data on take-home food and drink purchasing to investigate the influences of price promotions on shopping choices, overweight and obesity in Great Britain. It adds to existing evidence base that supports the restriction of price promotions on less healthy food and drink in the UK.

Around 3 in 10 food and drink items in supermarket baskets are bought on promotion in Great Britain



## Key Findings

**Around 3 in 10 food and drink items in supermarket baskets are bought on promotion in Great Britain**

29% of food and drink items bought by the panel were purchased on promotion.

All studied demographic groups (region, life stage, income) made similar use of price promotions, suggesting that a promotions-based intervention could have influence across the British population.

**Shoppers who buy more on promotion are more likely to be overweight or obese**

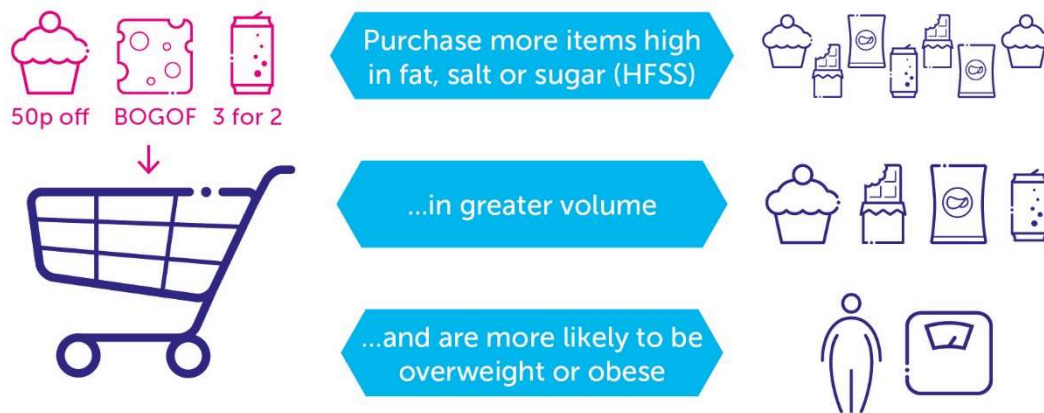
High promotional shoppers<sup>a</sup> – the quarter of shoppers who buy the largest proportion of their basket on promotion – are 28% more likely to be obese than low promotional shoppers<sup>b</sup>.

High promotional shoppers are also 13% more likely to be overweight (including obese) than low promotional purchasers.

The association between overweight and obesity and promotional purchasing was seen in all income groups, and was independent of age, life stage, and region.

<sup>a</sup>The upper and <sup>b</sup>lower quartiles of promotional purchasers.

## Shoppers who buy more of their food and drink on promotion



### Shoppers who buy more on promotion buy greater amounts of less healthy food and drink

High promotional shoppers buy around a fifth more High in Fat, Salt or Sugar (HFSS) items than low promotional shoppers – in a 2 adult, 2 school-child household this equates to around 11 extra HFSS items a month.

High promotional shoppers also buy a quarter more HFSS volume than low promotional shoppers.

### Promotional purchasing is associated with changes in overall nutrition

High promotional shoppers tend to buy a less healthy balance of nutrients. They purchase more sugar and less fibre than low promotional shoppers.

### Promotional purchasing is skewed towards less healthy food categories

Overall, the food and drinks bought on promotion in Great Britain are biased towards less healthy categories. Staple foods like fruit and vegetables are underrepresented in the foods bought on price promotion.

### Shoppers who buy more on promotion tend to buy less fruit and vegetables

High promotional shoppers buy more from typically less healthy food categories like cakes, confectionery, crisps, sugary drinks and puddings. This is at the expense of foods in healthier categories such as fruit, vegetables and unsweetened yoghurts.

### What should government do?

1. Introduce restrictions on price promotions for less healthy food and drink items, focusing first on multi-buy offers. These policies should be as aligned as possible across nations.
2. Commit to reviewing the evidence base on other kinds of price promotions, including temporary price reductions, and take further action to restrict those if necessary.
3. Introduce restrictions on location-based promotions for less healthy foods to support restrictions on price promotions.
4. Fully implement other measures in the obesity strategies, to create a healthier food environment and support families to make healthier choices.

## Methodology

Take-home food and drink purchasing and demographic data for a representative panel of British households were collected by Kantar Worldpanel and purchased by Cancer Research UK. Data for over 10,000 households were analysed using regression approaches to study associations between promotional purchasing, demographic factors, overweight/obesity, and food and drink quantities.

## Report

This report should be referred to as follows:

“Paying the price: New evidence on the link between price promotions, purchasing of less healthy food and drink, and overweight and obesity in Great Britain”. Timothy Coker, Harriet Runggay, Emily Whiteside, Gillian Rosenberg, Jyotsna Vohra. 2019.

## Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world’s largest independent cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. We support research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2017/2018, we spent £423 million on research institutes, hospitals and universities across the UK. We receive no funding from Government for our research.

This research was funded by the Cancer Policy Research Centre, Cancer Research UK.



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Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103)

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/>

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