



NO SWEET TREATS: Children often influence purchases

Woolworths makes bittersweet move

Praise for Woolies' removal of sweet treats at the check-out line

Estelle Ellis
ellise@timesmedia.co.za

CHECK-OUT lines are known as "toxic food environments" in health circles, and the plethora of sweets, chocolates and junk food create maximum temptation in exchange for minimum nutrition – adding to the country's growing obesity problem.

Retail giant Woolworths has responded with an announcement last week that they will be removing all sweets and chocolates from their check-out queues.

Spencer Sonn, member of the foods leadership team at Woolworths, said: "Customers can trust that Woolworths has their best interests at heart, and as a father myself, I am proud that we are leading the way on providing healthier kids' options."

"We want to thank our customers for their continuing support and their

feedback on the kind of snacks they would like to see on the stands at pay points."

The rollout will start with all new Woolworths stores, as well as large format stores.

Diabetes trainer and dietician Hamish van Wyk said, given the current high rates of Type 2 diabetes and pre-diabetes in Nelson Mandela Bay, he considered it an important step.

"I was incredibly happy to hear Woolworths has taken the stand to try to make healthy eating a little easier," Van Wyk said.

"For too long we have been trying to educate people to eat a healthy diet but failed to change the environment they find themselves in."

For food to qualify as "healthy", according to the Centre for Science in the Public Interest in the US, it has to contain:

- No more than 200 calories and no more than 35% calories of the total calories from fat, excluding nuts, seeds and cheese;

- Less than 10% of total calories from saturated fat and no more than 0.5 grams trans fat;

- No more than 35% of the calories from sugar, excluding yoghurt and fruit;

- No more than 200mg of sodium; and

- No artificial sweeteners.

Van Wyk said he would love to see fruit and vegetables and even low-cost toys in the newly designed check-out lines.

"I like the idea of inexpensive toys for children that encourage physical activity, as children often influence purchases."

"Bouncy balls, skipping ropes and foamite model aeroplanes that can be thrown into the air are all ways to get kids playing outside a bit more and eating less unhealthy foods."

Tanya Wyatt from the health consultancy Happy Body said the move by Woolworths was long overdue, and that in the UK it had been a legal obligation for supermarkets for many

years.

"I think the current worldwide views on and feelings about sugar have created massive pressure on companies to do something about what and how they sell."

"Having sweets in front of people in long queues has meant children in particular have been exposed to sugar far more than they should have been, impacting on their eating trend."

"I suspect they have also learnt to modify their behaviour down this 'aisle' of goodies, so that even the most committed parents – at some point – give in."

"I think non-food items would be a good idea. Reading matter, for example, gives you something to do!"

"Putting any sort of food in the check-out line means impulse purchases are bound to happen and no instant foods are particularly good for you. Much as I'd like to though, I can't see people buying vegetables to munch on!"