

Size matters

The impact of upselling on weight gain



Contents

Section	Page
Key Points	3
Foreword	5
Introduction	6
Upselling: a trick of the trade	6
The impact of upselling on people's weight	9
League table of upselling settings	9
What do the public say?	10
Learning techniques to resist upselling	11
Recommendations	14
About RSPH – About Slimming World	14-15



Key Points

- More than two-thirds of the UK adult population are now overweight or obese
- Obesity-related illness is predicted to cost the NHS £10 billion per year by the year 2050
- The food and drink industry use a variety of marketing techniques to persuade consumers to consume more
- Upselling is used by the food and drink industry to “persuade customers to buy something additional or more expensive” that they otherwise wouldn’t have bought
- More than three-quarters (78%) of the public experience upselling at least once in a typical week
- One in three buy a larger coffee than intended, upgrade to a large meal in a fast food restaurant and buy chocolate at the till in a petrol station in the course of a typical week
- The average person in the UK will be upsold unhealthy high calorie food and drink 106 times per year
- Drip-drip effect of regular upselling means the average person will consume more than 17,000 extra calories per year as a result of the upselling of unhealthy high calorie food and drink
- People who take an upsell will generally spend around 17% more money but receive 55% more calories
- These extra calories amount to an estimated weight gain of around 5lbs per year*
- Young people aged 18-24 are the most likely to experience upselling, consuming an additional 750 calories per week as a result and potentially gaining 11lbs in a year*

*1lb in weight is said to be the equivalent of 3,500 calories.

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Recommendations

- For consumers to be more aware of additional calorie intake from upselling
- Business rates relief for businesses that try to improve the public’s health



Foreword



Shirley Cramer CBE
Chief Executive, RSPH

It is over a decade since the Government Office for Science published its Foresight project report, *Tackling Obesity: Future Choices* which looked at what action needed to be taken to halt rising levels of obesity in the UK. The report warned that we live in a complex obesogenic environment and that, by 2050, combined costs of obesity along with diseases related to a raised BMI could reach £70 billion.

Unless we make a concerted effort across the whole of society, we risk placing an unsustainable burden on our health services. However, costs to the health service are not the only impact of obesity and overweight. The costs to society and the individuals who struggle with weight are many and include absence from work and reduction both in quality of life and life expectancy.

Recent years have seen numerous initiatives to encourage business, food manufacturers and retailers to voluntarily take responsibility for the impact that they have on rising levels of obesity. There have been calls for better, clearer food labelling and for the reformulation of foods to reduce the amount of salt, fat and sugar, alongside calls for the restriction of fast food outlets on the high street. But those initiatives will continue to be undermined as long as unhealthy products are promoted and marketed to us and our children through ‘upselling’.

When the RSPH and Slimming World conducted research to ask the general public about their experience of upselling – to be persuaded to buy something additional or more expensive than they otherwise would have bought – nearly 80% of them said they had experienced being upsold to at least once in a week. The consequence is that every three days we are offered an extra or larger portion of food or drink that is high in fat, salt or sugar.

For those of us who do not have the knowledge, motivation or resolve to say “just this thanks”, being upsold to means that we could consume an extra 17,000 calories in a year, with the drip-drip effect of this leading to constant weight gain. For young people, who are the most likely to experience upselling, that could mean as much as an 11lb weight gain each year.

In this report we call for consumers to be made more aware of the practice of upselling high calorie products with raised levels of fat, salt or sugar that, when consumed excessively, are likely to cause people to gain weight.

Crucially, we also call for businesses to take responsibility and stop the practice that puts quick profit ahead of the nation’s health. In particular, we need to protect children and young people who are most likely to experience being upsold to and also often the least equipped to deal with the tricks of the trade employed by businesses.

Last year, RSPH and Slimming World released *‘The Child’s Obesity Strategy’*¹ – a report that put forward the views and ideas of young people themselves to help solve the childhood obesity crisis. We are delighted to continue our partnership with this report and continue to tackle obesity-related issues.



Jenny Caven,
Head of External Affairs,
Slimming World

Introduction

Obesity levels in the UK are now at epidemic proportions. Over two-thirds of the adult population are now overweight or obese.² If predicted trends are correct, 60% of men and 50% of women could have an obese BMI, by 2050³. The cause of obesity is excess energy consumption relative to energy expenditure,⁴ but both genetic and environmental factors can contribute to its development.⁵ It is thought that the average adult is consuming 200-300 more calories than they need every day.⁶ Obesity can cause seriously detrimental and even life-threatening conditions such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, certain cancers such as breast and bowel cancer, and stroke.⁷ The direct economic costs the projected obesity rise would place on the National Health Service are estimated to be in the region of £10 billion - with the wider costs to society and businesses expected to be in the region of £49.9 billion.⁸

If policy makers and those working within public health do not address this issue and its causes urgently, our health care system may not be able to cope with the strain placed on it from obesity-related illness in the coming decades. Responsibility for supporting people to maintain a healthy weight falls with everyone. This includes the food and drink industry, who wield great power to influence consumer behaviour, for better or worse.

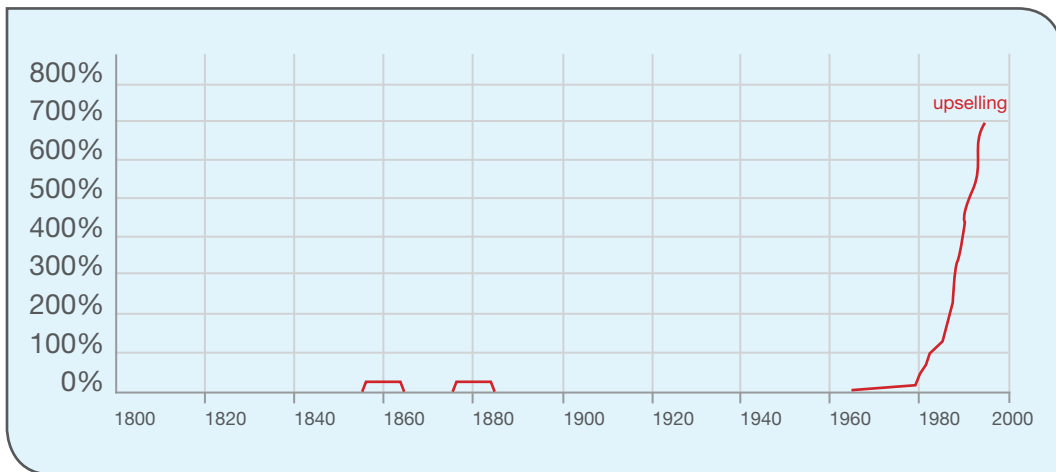
Upselling – a trick of the trade

Consumers are being overwhelmed with information in a food and drink market that can be difficult to understand. The industry uses numerous marketing ploys and consumer psychology to maximise sales, leading to the industry being worth over £100 billion annually in the UK.⁹ Most consumers will be familiar with common practices such as buy-one-get-one-free offers, half price deals on certain products, reduced for a limited time or multi-pack discount bargains on food and drink. All of these techniques are used to maximise profit whilst making consumers feel like they've received a good deal. These deals are also seen to be detrimental for the public's health, so much so that in 2015 the Commons Health Select Committee recommended that the Government take action to introduce tougher controls on the marketing of unhealthy food and drink in promotional offers.¹⁰

Another example of an industry profit technique is the practice of upselling. By definition, upselling is the act of “persuading a customer to buy something additional or more expensive.”¹¹ The term is a relatively new concept that has only been widely used since mass-marketing was introduced during the 1980s.

► **Upselling** Persuading a customer to buy something additional or extra

People who take an upsell will generally spend around 17% more money but receive 55% more calories



Source: Google Books¹².

The practice occurs at the point-of-sale and is not at the customer's request. Studies have shown that when people are presented with larger portion sizes, they consume more and increase their calorie intake.¹³

Examples of upselling include:

- A coffee shop barista asking if you would like a large rather than a regular sized cup of latte or a whipped cream topping.
- A petrol station attendant inquiring if you would like a supersized bar of chocolate when paying for fuel.
- A fast food worker asking if you would like to make your meal a large for only 50p extra.
- A till worker at a cinema seeing if you would like to make your box of popcorn a large instead of a regular.
- A barman/barmaid asking if you would like to make your drink a double rather than a single measure.

The food and drink industry do not try and hide the practice and The Caterer magazine even published an article entitled; "Upselling: 20 ways to extend the spend".¹⁴ Food and drink vendors can profit greatly from upselling. The monetary cost for the food and drink industry to increase portion sizes through upselling is negligible, but a small increase in cost for the consumer can contribute to big profit margins for companies.¹⁵ There is also plenty of consumer psychology at work. For example, in fast-food outlets, prices of regular size portions are set sufficiently high, and larger portions set sufficiently low that price conscious and value-savvy consumers are tempted to order larger portions and overeat when prompted by a member of staff.¹⁶ People who take an upsell will generally spend around 17% more money but receive 55% more calories.¹⁷

In 2016, the Government published its much delayed Childhood Obesity Strategy. Far from being the 'game-changing moment' former Prime Minister David Cameron had promised, experts criticized the strategy as watered-down and accused policymakers of squandering the opportunity to change the tide of a public health crisis. "The Obesity Health Alliance, which includes leading charities, health organisations and Royal Colleges, commented at the time that the Government's obesity announcement, "lets down future generations."

Working in a pub, the first way we're trained to upsell is to ask people if they'd like a pint instead of a regular on drinks such as coke or a large wine instead of a medium. We use offers listed on the menu to help us upsell food, for example I can say "would you like a portion of chips? They're half price". There are also offers such as 3 starters for £12 and 3 deserts for £7, meaning if a table of two orders starters or deserts they usually end up with an extra one. The major incentive for upselling is a team competition, with a prize for the winning team. We upsell to try and increase the amount of money spent by each table and the "perfect tab" which is when a table orders starters, main courses, a side, desserts and two rounds of drinks."

Anonymous pub worker

Younger people also seem to be particularly susceptible to upselling. As we know, they are often susceptible to other forms of marketing of unhealthy food products.¹⁸ RSPH/Slimming World public polling data showing that 90% of 18 – 24 year olds say they experience some degree of upselling in a typical week, compared with 59% of the over 65s.

RSPH and Slimming World believe that upselling may be contributing to the rising obesity trends we are seeing in the UK. This report will explore the extent to which upselling is increasing our calorie intake and suggest ways in which businesses can help combat these extra, unnecessary calories, and make the healthy choice the easy choice.

"I've been trained so that if a customer asks for a product I always ask if they'd like to make that a meal. We often get reminded of hourly goals of how many large meals we're expected to sell and if a senior member of staff sees that you are forgetting to prompt the question they will make sure to remind you."

Anonymous fast food restaurant worker




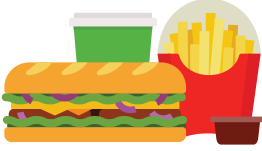

"My induction training including a section on upselling and how to get people to buy more when making an order, and this is described by management as a key part of customer service. For example, if someone asks for a latte, I will reply with "large?". The confidence of insinuating that a large is in fact what a typical customer orders often nudges the customer into order to the bigger and slightly more expensive drink. We also use this technique to get people to upgrade their order. For example, when customers order cake, we ask "is that with cream or ice cream today?". Management does observe us to check we are upselling and often say "did you ask them what size coffee they would like?" to make sure we are using the correct techniques. I have been recognised for my improving skills in upselling and was recently given a wage increase as a result."



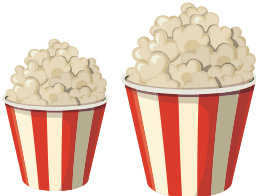

Anonymous café worker

The impact of upselling on people's weight

The average adult female needs around 2,000 calories per day to maintain their weight, with the average adult male needing somewhere in the region of 2,800 calories.¹⁹ Upselling can easily increase the extra unsatisfying calories we are consuming, often without us realising it. These calories are often high in fat, salt and/or sugar. This means they are high in energy density but low in satiation leading to hunger soon after consumption.

The table below shows items of food and drink that are commonly upsold by the food and drink industry. It demonstrates how many extra calories you may consume as a direct result of an upsell.





FOOD/DRINK	ORIGINAL CALORIES	UPSELL CALORIES	ADDITIONAL CALORIES
 <p>Short caffe mocha > Venti caffe mocha (with whole milk and whipped cream)</p>	249	564	315
 <p>Small chocolate bar > large chocolate bar</p>	240	1,060	820
 <p>Sandwich > meal deal (crisps + bottle of coke) from train station</p>	402	676	274
 <p>Medium fast food meal > large fast food meal</p>	1,070	1,219	149
 <p>Add onion rings at to meal at restaurant (pie, chips and peas)</p>	1,593	1,931	338

FOOD/DRINK	ORIGINAL CALORIES	UPSELL CALORIES	ADDITIONAL CALORIES
 <p>Regular > large glass of wine at bar</p>	106	211	105
 <p>Single measure > double measure at pub/bar</p>	115	168	53
 <p>Small popcorn > large popcorn at cinema</p>	318	816	498
 <p>Adding starter and dessert at restaurant (based on small nachos + choc fudge cake and ice cream)</p>	1,593	3,241	1,648

What do the public think?

In August 2017, RSPH and Slimming World commissioned public polling of 2,055 adults from across the UK to find out their views on upselling and how it may be contributing to extra calories in their diets. We asked them a variety of questions ranging from which settings they experience upselling in, to how frequently they experience the practice and which food and drink products they are most likely to be upsold.

The results reveal that upselling is a common experience in people's everyday lives with two-thirds (78%) of the population experiencing upselling at least once in a typical week. The below league table identifies the settings where upselling of unhealthy, high-calorie food and drink is most likely to occur:

Rank	Setting	% experience of upselling*
1	 Restaurants	72%
2	 Fast-food outlets	64%
3	 Supermarkets	60%
4	 Coffee shops	59%
5	 Pubs and bars	58%
6	Cinema	51%
7	Plane/Airport	46%
8	Petrol/Service Station	41%
9	Newsagents	40%
10	Train/Train Station	35%

**% of public who said they sometimes, often or always experience upselling*

In the last week...

Over one third (34%) of survey respondents had bought a larger coffee than originally intended after being encouraged by a member of staff.

Over one third (35%) of survey respondents had bought special offer sweets or chocolate at the till in a petrol station or newsagents after being encouraged by a member of staff.

Almost one third (32%) of survey respondents had ordered a large meal rather than a regular at a fast-food outlet after being encouraged by a member of staff.

Over one third (35%) of survey respondents had added sides like chips or onion rings to a meal after being encouraged by a member of staff.

What is the impact of upselling?

The average person in the UK experiences upselling around **107 times per year** when they are purchasing food and drink.

These upsells amount to people consuming an average of **17,188 additional calories per year**.

Experts estimate that 1lb in weight is the equivalent to 3,500 calories and so these extra calories could **add around 5lbs per year** on average, and even more to people who are particularly susceptible to upselling – such as younger adults.

The **18-24 age group** are the most likely to experience upselling with their total **additional calories per year estimated to be almost 40,000**. This could lead to an annual weight gain of around 11lbs.

Learning techniques to resist upselling

Some people are more susceptible to upselling of unhealthy food and drink than others. Research of 2,081 Slimming World members found that, before getting support to change their behaviour and manage their weight, 97% experienced upselling at least once in a typical week - compared to 78% of the general population. Two-thirds of Slimming World members (67%) felt it had caused them to gain weight and 53% said that it had made them feel bad about themselves for their perceived lack of willpower.

Fortunately, with motivating support, it is possible to develop techniques to resist upselling attempts and to learn to say 'just this thanks'. The survey showed that 80% of Slimming World members are now never or rarely upsold to and 89% said they feel more empowered to reject the verbal pushes of unhealthy food and drink that could have a negative impact on their weight.

Slimming World's support is based on helping members to make healthier food choices by selecting foods that are lowest in energy density (calories/gram) and the most filling or satiating. By avoiding feelings of hunger and knowing that they can always reach for a healthy food without having to worry about counting calories, Slimming World members avoid the feelings of guilt and shame so often associated with those who try to lose weight by dieting. It also means that they are better able to stick to a healthy plan, more equipped to make healthier choices and more empowered to say no when offered high-calorie foods that are often high in fat, sugar or salt and non-satiating.

So whether you are losing weight or just trying to keep your weight in check try to implement some of the Slimming World strategies:

- Planning what to eat beforehand (75%)
- Focusing choices on healthy, filling foods that satisfy the appetite (69%)
- Keeping 'count' of less healthy high calorie foods that can impact on weight loss if consumed in larger volumes (59%)
- Taking a healthier alternative with them (55%)
- Enjoying a healthy, filling meal before they go out (47%)



Case studies



Liam Smith, who has lost 6st with Slimming World, says before slimming down he visited fast food restaurants, coffee shops and pubs most days and believes the constant upselling in those outlets contributed to his weight gain.

The 25-year-old, who now runs his own Slimming World groups in Castleford, West Yorkshire, says: "Being able to 'go large' on a meal for 30p extra was always a no brainer for me, as was a few pence more for a large cup of hot chocolate or paying £1 more to turn a single burger into a double. Afterwards I'd wish I hadn't done it though – I can only describe it as a major feeling of guilt."

It was a particularly indulgent weekend in May 2016 that prompted Liam to make a change. He says: "We had a really unhealthy weekend – McDonald's breakfasts, takeaways, lots of alcohol – and I had to buy a XXL shirt to wear on our night out. My mum was joining Slimming World the following week, so I made her promise to take me along."

Liam dropped from 19st to 13st by following Slimming World's Food Optimising healthy eating plan and getting more active.

He says he's learned how to make healthier choices:

"I love making homemade burgers now - and when I'm cooking I'm in charge of the toppings and sides, which I make healthy versions of too! I can still treat myself though, so sometimes when I'm eating out I will choose to 'go large', but I know that I'm in control. I don't ever feel guilty about the food I'm eating anymore, which is a great feeling!"



Izzie Kennedy, who lost 9st 8lbs with Slimming World, believes upselling helped to fuel her unhealthy relationship with food when she was at her heaviest.

The 18-year-old, from Bexhill on Sea, says: *“Fast food restaurants are the places I most associate with upselling, as well as chain restaurants. Before I started losing weight I’d say I probably experienced it in some form most times I ate out – at fast food restaurants it tended to be upgrading the size of a milkshake or ice cream, and at chain restaurants it tended to be adding toppings to burgers or ordering more sides than I originally intended.*

“It used to make me feel weak – I even took to asking other people to order for me at one point. That feeling of being out of control used to be paired with guilt, which would most likely prompt comfort eating.”

Since joining Slimming World, Izzie says she visits fast food restaurants less frequently and enjoys cooking from scratch. She also feels more in control when eating out:

“I usually look at the menu beforehand so have an idea of what I will choose, which I find helps in resisting the offer of extras or sizes. Discussing menus with other Slimming World members at my weekly group also helps me to make good choices.”

Recommendations

1. For consumers to be more aware of additional calorie intake from upselling

Our public polling data shows the extent to which people may be consuming extra calories as a result of upselling. The public should be more aware of the potential for this sales technique to add extra calories to their diet without them necessarily realising – particularly if they are watching their calorie intake and weight.

We would like to see the Making Every Contact Count (MECC) initiatives delivered by health professionals across the UK to have a component to them that informs the public about the ‘unhealthy conversations’ they may encounter, particularly in relation to upselling of food and drink. This would mean staff trained in MECC make people aware of the upselling practice and give them the knowledge, skills and practical advice to avoid unplanned and unwanted extra calories. There are literally millions of MECC interactions every day happening across a huge range of health related settings in the UK and it’s important that the interactions that focus on losing weight include information about upselling and its potential for increased calorie intake.

2. Business rates relief for businesses that try to improve the public’s health

Businesses must take their fair share of responsibility for the obesity epidemic that is gripping the UK and put in place measures to aid their customers, especially young people, to make healthier decisions. This means making the healthy choice the easy choice. Currently, businesses may receive business rates relief if they meet a number of criteria set by local councils including; if they are a small business, a rural business, a charity or in an enterprise zone, among others. We would like to see discounted business rates for companies that adhere to a set of principles aimed at improving the public’s health. If businesses meet the four principles outlined below they would qualify for reduced rates.

The four principles are:

- 1. Businesses do not train staff to upsell unhealthy, high-calorie food and drink - such as foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) as defined by the nutrient profile model developed by the Foods Standards Agency (FSA).**
- 2. Businesses to pledge to only upsell healthy food and drink.**
- 3. Businesses provide clear in-store calorie information for all their food and drink products (including alcohol).**
- 4. Staff pay is not linked to the upselling of unhealthy, high-calorie food and drink. Businesses should not financially incentivise food and drink that is damaging to the public’s health when consumed to excess.**

About Slimming World

Established in 1969, Slimming World is the UK’s largest independent weight management organisation and holds around 16,000 groups weekly across Britain — in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Groups are run by a network of 4,500 Slimming World trained, self-employed Consultants who have all been successful members. More than 900,000 members attend groups in community venues each week.

Slimming World’s method is as simple as it is successful. The unique Food Optimising programme is a healthy eating plan based on the science of energy density that helps members to reduce energy intake without having to count calories so that they can satisfy their appetite from a huge range of healthy, low fat, every day foods – with no need for hunger or guilt, two of the traditional saboteurs of weight loss.

This is backed up by a plan which motivates people to gradually increase activity until it becomes part of everyday life. These lifestyle changes are facilitated within empowering, supportive community-based weekly groups.

About RSPH

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) is an independent health education charity, dedicated to protecting and promoting the public's health and wellbeing. RSPH is the world's longest-established public health body with over 6000 members drawn from the public health community both in the UK and internationally. RSPH's operations include an Ofqual recognised awarding organisation, a training and development arm, and health and wellbeing accreditation. RSPH also produce a wide-variety of public health conferences and the publishing division includes the internationally renowned journal Public Health. RSPH also develops wide-reaching policy and campaigns to promote better health and wellbeing for the public.

Acknowledgments

With special thanks to:

- Dr Sheena Leek, Programme Director for MSc Marketing Suite, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham
- Professor Isabelle Szmigin, Deputy Dean of Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham
- Anne Heughan, RSPH Trustee

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