

Why sweets were moved away from the checkout

From the sweeties.net wiki

Older shoppers will remember when supermarket checkouts had racks of sweets and chocolate bars. Campaigners called it pester power. Today, in most big shops in England, the sweets have gone from the tills. Here is how that happened.

Pester power

The campaigners' argument was simple: people waiting in the queue, and especially children, are faced with snacks they had not planned to buy. Research by the University of Sheffield found that 90 per cent of the food on display at supermarket checkouts was unhealthy. The British Dietetic Association warned that pester power at checkouts could lead to unplanned calories and contribute to poor diet and ill health. Sustain's Children's Food Campaign ran a campaign for junk free checkouts with the dietitians for years.

The supermarkets move first

Tesco acted early, removing confectionery from the checkouts of its larger stores in 1994. Twenty years later, in January 2014, Lidl took unhealthy snacks off the checkouts in all its stores. In May 2014 Tesco followed, saying it would clear sweets and chocolate from the checkouts of every store by the end of the year, including its small Metro and Express shops. Its own research found 65 per cent of customers felt it would help them make healthier choices, and 67 per cent of parents said the same about choices for their children. Not everyone was convinced: an industry voice questioned whether a blanket ban was the best way to tackle obesity.

The law steps in

In the end the government legislated. The Food (Promotion and Placement) (England) Regulations 2021 came into force on 1 October 2022. They stop medium and large shops from placing less healthy food and drink:

- within 2 metres of a checkout
- within 2 metres of a designated queuing area
- at the end of an aisle
- in the store entrance area

Retailers selling food online face similar rules.

What counts as less healthy

Not every sweet is caught automatically. The rules cover certain categories of food, including chocolate confectionery, sugar confectionery, soft drinks with added sugar, cakes, biscuits, breakfast cereals, ice cream and ready meals. Within those categories, a product counts as less healthy if it scores 4 or more on the government's nutrient profiling model, or 1 or more for drinks.

Who has to follow the rules

The location rules apply to retailers with 50 or more employees, and only in stores with at least 185.8 square metres, or 2,000 square feet, of relevant floor space. Specialist shops that only or mainly sell food from one category are exempt from the location rules, though not from the rules on price promotions. These rules apply in England.

Buy one get one free

The same regulations also banned multibuy deals, such as buy one get one free, on less healthy food. That part was delayed, and came into force in England on 1 October 2025. A survey at the time found 61 per cent of shoppers thought banning these multibuy deals was a good idea, even though two thirds had not known it was coming. But the government had already announced that it intended to repeal the multibuy restrictions, replacing them with mandatory reporting of how much healthy food large companies sell. The repeal needs the approval of Parliament. The checkout rules were not part of that change.

What it is for

Moving sweets away from the checkout does not stop anyone buying them. The aim was to cut the impulse buys made while waiting to pay, especially by children. For the tax side of the story, see [the sugar tax and sweets](#).

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