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Cinema patrons don't change eating habits regardless of nutrition labels

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People munching popcorn in a cinema don't change their eating habits whether the snacks are labelled high fat, low fat or not labelled at all, even if they are concerned about their weight, according to a new study led by the University of Greenwich.

But add in a third factor – the socioeconomic background of eaters – and some quirky results emerge. When concerned eaters of higher status saw the low fat label, it made them eat more than their unconcerned counterparts.

Labels had the opposite effect on concerned popcorn lovers of lower status: they ate less of the low fat snack – and less of the high fat snack. But they did tuck in as normal to the unlabelled tub.

Dr Rachel Crockett, Senior Research Fellow at the university's Faculty of Education & Health, led the research. She says: "Nutritional labelling is being advocated by policy makers internationally, as a means to promote healthy eating, but there has been very little research assessing the impact of labelling on eating behaviour in the general population.

"This research is important as it suggests that nutritional labelling may help people who want to lose weight from lower socioeconomic groups to eat more healthily."

The research paper, titled "The impact of nutritional labels and socioeconomic status on energy intake: An experimental field study,"

has been published in international journal *Appetite*.

Nearly 300 participants who took part in the research attended a London cinema and were offered a large tub of salted or toffee popcorn. Participants received their selected flavour with one of three labels: a green low-fat label, a red high-fat label or no label. They then watched two film clips while completing measures of demographic characteristics, emotional state and taste of the popcorn. Following the experiment, popcorn consumption was measured.

Provided by University of Greenwich

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