

What would Batman eat? Priming children to make healthier fast food choices

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Popeye inspired a generation of growing Baby Boomers to eat its spinach. Today, role models such as Batman can prompt children to develop their own healthy eating habits, a recent Cornell University study finds.

"Fast food patronage is a frequent reality for many children and their parents. Simply instructing a parent to order healthier food for a child is neither empowering for a child nor easy for a parent," said Brian Wansink, Cornell professor of marketing, director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and study co-author. "Advising parents to ask their child, 'What would Batman eat?' might be a realistic step to take in what could be a healthier fast-food world."

The findings appear in the paper, "What would Batman eat? Priming children to make healthier fast [food choices](#)," which is published in the journal [Pediatric Obesity](#). Wansink, along with post-doctoral researcher Mitsuru Shimizu and visiting graduate student Guido Camps of Utrecht University in the Netherlands, conducted a study in which 22 children, ages 6 to 12, at a summer camp were asked if they wanted apple fries or [French fries](#) during several consecutive Wednesday lunches.

Fully 45 percent of the children selected apple fries after being shown pictures of superheroes and other role models, compared to the 9 percent who chose apple fries with no superhero prompts.

"On average, children who selected apple fries consumed only 34

calories whereas children who selected French fries consumed 227 calories. That's almost seven times as many calories just from the side dish of the meal," Wansink said. "If you eat fast food once a week, a small switch from French fries to apple fries could save your children almost three pounds of weight a year."

More information: For more information about What Would Batman Eat?, visit: foodpsychology.cornell.edu/outreach/batman.html

The paper is available online at: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111.00003.x/abstract

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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