

# Can branding improve school lunches?

August 28 2012

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A popular marketing ploy with junk foods and other indulgent table fare can be an equally effective tool for promoting healthier eating in school cafeterias.

"Nutritionists and [school lunch](#) planners can turn the tables on children's poor eating habits by adopting the same 'branding' tactic used by junk food marketers," said Brian Wansink, an expert on the subtle cues that affect people's eating habits and professor of marketing at the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University.

Food marketers have associated particular foods with mascots, super heroes and other characters for decades. Such marketing tactics have been effective for promoting everything from candies to sugary breakfast cereals, but they can also be used to induce youngsters and adolescents to choose [healthier foods](#), according to research published in the journal, [Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine](#). Wansink is lead author of the study, "Can Branding Improve School Lunches?" His co-authors are David R. Just, associate professor of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell; and Collin R. Payne, professor of Marketing at New Mexico State University.

"Branding has tremendous potential to promote healthier eating. We tend to associate mascots and characters with [junk food](#), but they can also be used to build excitement around healthy foods. This is a powerful lesson for fast food companies, food activists and people involved in school food service," Wansink said.

The researchers offered children a choice between cookies and apples. In some cases, generic apples and cookies were offered; in other cases, the apples were 'branded' with stickers of "Elmo," a popular cartoon character. Wansink, Just and Payne discovered that placing stickers of popular children's [cartoon characters](#) on apples encouraged more children to choose the fruits over sweets.

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

Citation: Can branding improve school lunches? (2012, August 28) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-branding-school-lunches.html>

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