

Celebrity endorsement encourages children to eat junk food

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A study by the University of Liverpool has found that celebrity endorsement of a food product encourages children to eat more of the endorsed product. It also found that children were prompted to eat more of the endorsed product when they saw the celebrity on TV in a different context.

Celebrity endorsement is an effective method of creating value, recognition and credibility for a brand, and celebrities are frequently used in [television advertising](#) to induce [children](#) to try foods. An example of this is former England international soccer player Gary Lineker, now principally a TV sports presenter, who has been endorsing Walker's Crisps since 1995.

The study involved 181 children, aged between 8 and 11 years old, who were asked to watch one of three different adverts or general TV footage (Match of the Day featuring Gary Lineker as the main presenter) embedded within a 20-minute cartoon. The adverts were for Walkers crisps (featuring Gary Lineker as a celebrity endorser), a different snack food or a toy product.

The children were offered two bowls of crisps to eat, one labelled 'Walkers' and one labelled 'Supermarket' although both bowls actually contained Walkers crisps. The amount of crisps consumed from each bowl by each child was then measured.

The study found that although both bowls contained Walkers crisps,

after watching the Gary Lineker advert or the general TV footage of Gary Lineker, the children ate considerably more of the Walkers [crisps](#) than the children who watched the other [snack food](#) advert or the toy advert.

Dr Emma Boyland, from the Institute of Psychology, Health and Society who led the research, said: "This is the first study to show the powerful effects of celebrity endorsement - in both a TV advertising and a non-food context - on the choice and intake of the endorsed snack product over the same product offered as a non-branded snack item.

"The study demonstrated, for the first time, that the influence of the celebrity extended even further than expected and prompted the children to eat the endorsed product even when they saw the celebrity outside of any actual promotion for the brand. It quantifies the significant influence that the celebrity has over children's brand preferences and actual consumption.

"This research has consequences for the use of celebrities, and in particular sports stars, in advertising unhealthy or High Fat Salt and Sugar (HFSS) products. If [celebrity endorsement](#) of HFSS products continues and their appearance in other contexts prompts unhealthy food intake then this would mean that the more prominent the celebrity the more detrimental the effects on children's diets."

The research is published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*.

Provided by University of Liverpool

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