

Manga comics may help promote fruit consumption among youth

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A recent pilot study in Brooklyn, New York, with minority students found that exposure to Manga comics (Japanese comic art) promoting fruit intake significantly improved healthy snack selection. As snacking accounts for up to 27% of children's daily caloric intake, and childhood obesity has been linked to inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables, the results of this study could have wide-reaching implications.

"Manga comics could be used to promote healthier behaviors and beliefs related to fruit consumption in at-risk youth. The graphics and minimal text make it a promising format to engage younger populations," said lead author May May Leung, PhD, RD, City University of New York School of Public Health and Hunter College.

The study was set in two after-school programs affiliated with Brooklyn Community Services, a New York City-based nonprofit community organization, in the summer and fall of 2011. It comprised 57 youth, approximately 11 years of age, nearly 90% of whom were either Black/African American or Hispanic and 54% were female. The school districts in the study had greater percentages of students eligible for free lunch (79 and 96%, respectively) compared to the citywide average of 66%.

The researchers used an innovative intervention promoting positive dietary behaviors to capture the attention of youth living in a multimedia environment; specifically, Manga comics, which are Japanese comic art. Manga is a unique form of multimodal narrative media combining visual

images and text. According to the Transportation-Imagery Model, persuasion of a story's messages occurs because an individual is "transported" or immersed into the narrative world, and images in a story are impactful in influencing behavior, which is why Manga was selected for this study.

After reading either a Manga comic, titled "Fight for Your Right to Fruit," or a non-health-related newsletter, children were given the choice between a healthy snack (oranges, grapes, apples, strawberries) or an energy-dense snack (cookies, potato chips, nacho chips, and cheese-filled crackers). Sixty-one percent of children in the comic group chose a [healthy snack](#) after reading, opposed to just 35% of the control group.

Approximately 30% to 45% of US children between the ages of 6 and 18 years do not meet recommended fruit consumption levels. Therefore, the results of this study could be useful in promoting healthy decision-making among youth as it relates to food consumption. However, because this was a pilot study, studies with a larger sample size are necessary, as are studies examining the effects of more traditional media.

More information: "Manga Comic Influences Snack Selection in Black and Hispanic New York City Youth," by May May Leung, PhD, RD; Gina Tripicchio, MEd, MS; Alen Agaronov, MS, RDN; Ningqi Hou, PhD, DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2013.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2013.11.004), *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, published online ahead of Volume 46, Issue 2 (March/April 2014)

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