

Using 'fitness' labels on foods may cause consumers to eat more, exercise less

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Credit: Patrick Mansell

People who are dieting or who try to balance exercise and healthy eating often seek out food that is thought to fit into their regimen. However, a study co-authored by Hans Baumgartner of the Penn State Smeal College of Business found that "fitness branding" can encourage people who are concerned about their weight to eat more and exercise less.

The study, titled "The Effect of Fitness Branding on Restrained Eaters' Food Consumption and Post-Consumption Physical Activity," will be published in a future issue of the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

"Fitness food may put restrained eaters in double jeopardy," wrote Baumgartner and co-author Joerg Koenigstorfer of Technische Universität München in Munich, Germany. "It makes them eat more and exercise less."

The authors investigated how restrained eaters, those who are chronically concerned about their body weight, are affected by fitness-branded food in terms of their [food consumption](#) and [physical activity](#).

Participants were asked to evaluate a new trail mix. The study assessed consumption volumes depending on whether the trail mix was labeled 'Fitness Trail Mix' or simply 'Trail Mix.' The 'Fitness' mix also featured a picture of running shoes. Participants were instructed to pretend they were at home, eating an afternoon snack. They then had eight minutes to taste and rate the product. In one study participants were also invited to exercise as strenuously as they wanted on a stationary bike after consuming their snack.

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"The findings are interesting because this is the first research paper that shows that fitness branding of food does not only affect energy intake but also energy expenditure," Baumgartner said.

"Counterintuitively, and contrary to the principle of energy balance, fitness-branded food decreases physical activity for restrained eaters, even after they have consumed more [food](#) than unrestrained eaters. This is surprising since restrained eaters should be particularly interested in avoiding and burning off excess calories."

More information: "The Effect of Fitness Branding on Restrained Eaters' Food Consumption and Post-Consumption Physical Activity" *Journal of Marketing Research* In-Press. doi: [dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmr.12.0429](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.12.0429)

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