

# High in calories and low in nutrients when adolescents share pictures of food online

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A new study from the University of Gothenburg show that adolescents like to present foods that are high in calories but low in nutrients in social media.

Previous studies have found that interactions around [food](#) in [social media](#) can influence [adolescents'](#) consumption of candy and their

willingness to try unfamiliar foods. Research has also shown that food images stimulate areas of the brain that are associated with appetite in children and adolescents.

## **Analysed Instagram accounts**

The new study, published in the scientific journal *Appetite*, is based on an analysis of over 1000 Instagram accounts belonging to Scandinavian adolescents.

## **Eighty-five per cent of the accounts shared at least one food image**

'The most common food items were candy, cookies and other baked goods, sweet drinks, chocolate and [ice cream](#). Overall, these types of high-calorie and low-nutrient food items could be found in 68 per cent of the images posted on Instagram,' says Christopher Holmberg at the Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Science and one of the researchers behind the study titled Adolescents' presentation of food in social media: An explorative study.

Only 22 per cent of the pictures displayed fruits and vegetables.

Compared with other food categories, the researchers also found a particularly strong link between high-calorie/low-nutrient foods and positive descriptions and festive environments, such as birthday parties.

## **Markers of identity**

UK studies have found that food brands increase in importance and become important identity markers during adolescence. The researchers from the University of Gothenburg found that Coca Cola, Frappuccino

from Starbucks and ice cream from Ben&Jerry's are well represented in the posted images and therefore something the teenagers helped advertise through their Instagram accounts.

'This indicates that they are unaware of, or simply accept, this type of product promotion in social media. The fact that the adolescents create and disseminate the advertisements by themselves may imply that this type of informal advertising is more effective than traditional channels,' associate professor Christina Berg at the Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Science.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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