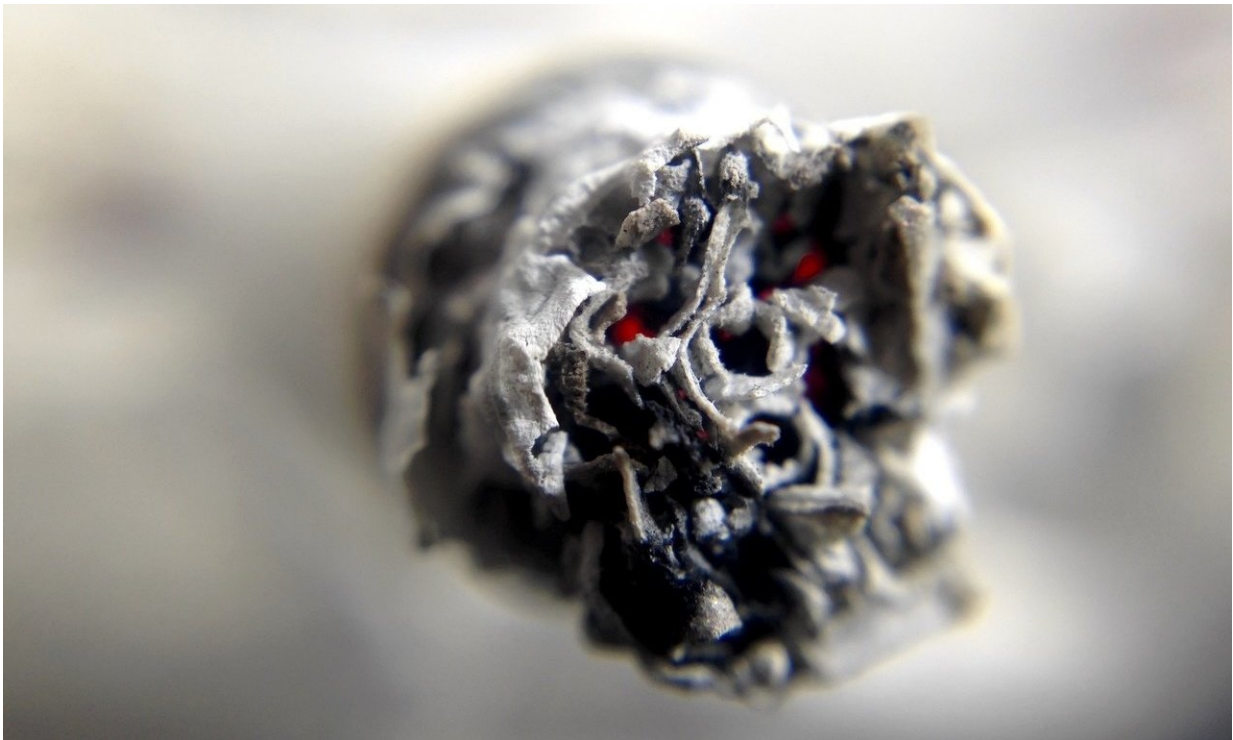


Junk food purchases increase after recreational marijuana legalization

February 28 2019, by Jaclyn Severance



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

It's an infamous pop culture portrayal. After smoking marijuana, the main characters in the movie go on an epic junk-food binge, consuming mass quantities of chips, cookies, and whatever other high-calorie, salt-or-sugar-laden snacks they can get. While some neuroscientists have hypotheses, there remains no formal causal evidence to support this

notorious effect of marijuana on the human brain.

A study released this month from a UConn economist, however, did find a link between state recreational [marijuana](#) legalization and increased consumption of certain high-calorie foods, suggesting there may be something more substantial to the urban myth of "the munchies."

Assistant professor of economics Michele Baggio conducted the study in collaboration with Alberto Chong, a professor at Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. Published by the *Social Science Research Network*, the study looked at data on monthly purchases of cookies, chips, and ice cream from grocery, convenience, drug, and mass distribution stores in more than 2,000 counties in the United States over a 10-year period. The data, largely taken from the Nielsen Retail Scanner database, covers 52 designated market areas in the 48 contiguous states.

The researchers compared purchasing trends to the implementation dates for recreational marijuana laws in states including Colorado, Oregon, and Washington. Their analysis showed that legalizing recreational marijuana led to a 3.1 percent increase in ice cream purchases, a 4.1 percent increase in cookie purchases, and a 5.3 percent increase in chip purchases immediately after recreational marijuana sales began. While increases in [ice cream](#) and chip purchases reduced slightly in the months following legalization, the increase for cookie purchases remains high.

"These might seem like small numbers," says Baggio. "But they're statistically significant and economically significant as well."

The trend was consistent across the three legalizing states included in the study. Additional states that have also legalized recreational marijuana were not included in the study because 18 months of purchasing data was not yet available for those states.

While Baggio initially set out to see whether ties existed between marijuana legalization and increased obesity rates, this study did not delve into an analysis of [obesity rates](#), instead focusing strictly on trends in sales data. Further analysis of health trends may come at a later date, but he says that both the growing marijuana industry and policymakers may find the developing research around varying aspects of marijuana legalization of interest when considering future policies.

"I'm not an advocate for legalization or not," Baggio says. "I'm just interested in whether there are unintended consequences to the policy."

More information: *Social Science Research Network*, [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.332861](#)

Provided by University of Connecticut

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