

# Licensed Characters on Food Packaging Affect Kids' Taste Preferences, Snack Selections

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Children significantly prefer the taste of junk foods branded with licensed cartoon characters on the packaging, compared with the same foods without characters, finds a new study from the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University. The study, published in *Pediatrics*, shows a causal relationship between licensed characters on food packaging and children's taste and snack preferences.

In the study, [children](#) between the ages of four and six-years old tasted three pairs of identical foods (graham crackers, gummy fruit snacks and carrots) presented in packages either with or without a popular cartoon character. Children tasted both food items in each pair and indicated whether the two tasted the same, or if one tasted better. Children then selected which of the foods they would prefer to eat for a snack.

Results indicated that children were significantly more likely to prefer the taste of the low-nutrient, high-energy foods such as graham crackers and gummy fruit snacks when a licensed cartoon character appeared on the package. The difference in preference was not significant for carrots. The study also found that children were significantly more likely to choose any of the licensed character-branded food items for snacks than those in packages without characters.

Rather than advocating the use of licensed characters in the marketing of healthy foods, these findings suggest a need for regulation to curtail the

use of licensed characters in the marketing of low-nutrient, high-energy foods, say the researchers.

“Our results provide evidence that licensed characters can influence children’s [eating habits](#) negatively by increasing positive taste perceptions and preferences for [junk food](#),” writes lead author Christina Roberto, M.S. “Given that 13% of marketing expenditures targeting youths are spent on character licensing and other forms of cross-promotion, our findings suggest that the use of licensed characters on junk [food packaging](#) should be restricted.”

Provided by Yale University

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