

# Industry should label food as a meal not a snack to prevent over-eating, say scientists

[foodnavigator.com /Article/2017/11/02/Industry-should-label-food-as-a-meal-not-a-snack-to-prevent-over-eating-say-scientists](https://www.foodnavigator.com/Article/2017/11/02/Industry-should-label-food-as-a-meal-not-a-snack-to-prevent-over-eating-say-scientists)



Researchers from the University of Surrey gave 80 women an identical pasta dish that was labelled either as a snack or a meal. They were allowed to choose between cooked cheese and tomato pasta or tuna and sweetcorn pasta, according to their personal preferences. Both varieties were equal in weight and calories.

Participants either ate it as a snack – from a plastic pot and with a plastic fork – or in ‘on-the-go’ conditions standing up, while the meal group were allowed to sit at a table and eat the pasta from a ceramic plate using metal cutlery.

Individuals were then invited to eat an ad lib amount of sweet and savoury snacks: animal-shaped biscuits, hula hoop crisps, chocolate M&M’s and mini cheddar crackers.

The psychology researchers found that not only did the ‘snackers’ eat more than those who were served the same pasta dish as a meal, but they also ate more in the subsequent taste test.

According to market research firm The Hartman Group, roughly half of the eating occasions in the US are now comprised of either snacks or ‘mini meals’.

Those who ate the pasta that was labelled as a snack ate “*significantly more*” sweet foods during the taste test, specifically chocolate, while those who ate the pasta that was presented in snack conditions ate more overall, both in weight and calories.

*“From a public health perspective, this presents a dilemma for those trying to encourage individuals to make healthy eating choices as people may opt for foods that are low in calories and frame these as a snack, which, in line with the ‘health halo’ may result in subsequent overeating,”* they write.

*“Accordingly, the food industry should be encouraged to label foods as ‘meals’ and healthy eating interventions*

*should discourage the consumption of foods labelled as 'snacks' to reduce intake."*

The researchers say the findings highlight the importance of the language used to describe food, and show that it is not only the terms 'healthy' and unhealthy' that have an impact but whether food is conceptualised as a 'snack' or a 'meal'.

*"With our lives getting busier increasing numbers of people are eating on the go and consuming foods that are labelled as 'snacks' to sustain them,"* said professor in health psychology at the University of Surrey and lead author of the study Jane Ogden.

*"What we have found is that those who are consuming snacks are more likely to over eat as they may not realise or even remember what they have eaten.*

*"To overcome this we should call our food a meal and eat it as meal, helping make us more aware of what we are eating so that we don't overeat later on,"* Ogden added.

The researchers suggest the difference in the amount of food eaten between the meal and snack groups may be because people are easily distracted when eating something as a snack. This means they could *"generate a less vivid memory of what they are eating affecting subsequent intake"*.

Source: *Appetite*

Published online ahead of print, doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2017.10.026

*"'Snack' versus 'meal': The impact of label and place on food intake"*

Author: Jane Ogden, Chloe Wood, Elise Payne, Hollie Fouracre and Frances Lammyman