



Don't Let Food Names Fool You!

By Amy Ahlberg, Rodale.com

If healthy eating, is important to you, watch out for misleading healthy-sounding food names. According to a study published online ahead of print in *The Journal of Consumer Research*, simply changing the name of a food item can influence its perceived healthfulness to dieters, who seem to rely more heavily on food cues—such as food names—than nondieters. Ambiguous names like "veggie chips," "flavored water," or simply calling a dish a "salad" can convince dieters that the item has nutritional value, whereas other names lead to the belief that the item is unhealthy.

The details: These perceptions can have unhealthy effects: According to study author Caglar Irmak, PhD, assistant professor of marketing at the Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina, the study's findings show that dieters may actually end up eating more of these not-so-healthy foods. Says Irmak, "One of our key findings is that dieters rate foods with healthy-sounding names [for example, salad] as healthier than identical food items with less-healthy-sounding names [for example, pasta]." Dieters base their food decisions on the name of the food items, instead of the ingredients, says Irmak. So they may eat more calories than what their dieting goals prescribe. "In one of our studies, when a candy was called 'fruit chews,' dieters ate significantly more candies than when the candy was called 'candy chews'."

[5 Ways food labels try to mislead you.](#)

What it means: Irmak's advice is to be vigilant about a food's actual ingredients. "Dieters need to focus on the ingredients of the food items, rather than names only, as many food items are healthy in name only," he says. But the good news is that checking the ingredients can erase the misleading effects of the food's name. "In one of our studies, when we asked dieters about the healthfulness of each ingredient in the food item before they evaluated the overall healthfulness of the item, the effect of the food name vanished," says Irmak.

It's possible to avoid being seduced by a healthy-sounding food, if you pay attention. Here are some tips for sorting the "health" from the hype:

[6 Things food industry executives don't want you to know.](#)

Salads aren't always healthy.

Often, dieters skip pizza and burgers and opt for main-course salads, imagining them to be the healthiest foods on the menu. And restaurants perpetuate the belief that their salads are nutritious, low-calorie options, even though many salads at chain restaurants can hover around (or top) 1,000 calories, thanks to gigantic portion sizes, fatty and/or fried toppings, and creamy dressings. These super-size salads can also contain almost a day's worth of sodium, so buyer beware. Fast fixes include having a half portion, if it's on the menu, or just packing up half of your order to take home.

All bottled waters aren't the same.

Some flavored waters or vitamin-enhanced waters can contain up to 200 calories per bottle. Sucking down just one of these a day could create a 20-pound weight gain in a year's time. A smarter substitution? Calorie-free flavored waters without added sugar or artificial sweeteners. Look for brands that contain just a hint of natural flavoring, or sip on naturally flavored seltzer water for hydration minus the additives.

Fruit-flavored snacks aren't fruit.

Gummy fruit treats, fruit roll-ups, fruit bars and other items with fruit on the label may contain some juice or fruit flavoring, but often don't actually contain fruit. But they can contain high-fructose corn syrup, partially hydrogenated oils, and other unhealthy ingredients. A superior swap is pretty obvious—go for fresh fruit. Another portable option? Chewy dried fruit (remember to check the label for added sugar and calories). Both offer up the fiber, antioxidants and other nutrients missing from fruit-flavored snacks.

Veggie chips are still, well, chips.

While baked veggie chips might seem better for you than traditional chips, they can still contain up to 8 grams of fat per one-ounce serving—almost as much as a small bag of potato chips. Having actual cut-up veggies, even with a small amount of dip, is a better way to satisfy your craving for crunch. The fat in the dip even helps with the absorption of key nutrients in the vegetables.