The Effects of Food-Related Retail Ambient Scents on Healthy/Unhealthy Food Purchases: An Abstract

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Abstract Retailers use ambient scent as a strategic tool to create an overall ambience and influence consumers. Food-related ambient scents are especially common in stores and restaurants. This research examines how indulgent (i.e., unhealthy) as opposed to non-indulgent (i.e., healthy) food-related ambient scents influence consumers' food choices. The results of three field studies with children and adult consumers show that indulgent (vs. non-indulgent) food-related ambient scents lead to lower sales of unhealthy food items. Follow-up studies replicate this finding in the laboratory and provide evidence for cross-modal sensory compensation as the process driving the effects of indulgent food-related ambient scents on unhealthy food choices. Implications for retail design and consumer well-being are discussed.

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