

As the benefits of healthy living become increasingly evident, public interest in nutrition has exploded. From cleanses to low-carb to gluten-free diets, people care more about crafting carefully considered diets more than ever before. When it comes to choosing from the vast array of foods available on the market, visual appearance can profoundly impact consumer choices. In particular, color can affect perceptions of nutritional qualities.

This was vividly demonstrated last year when Burger King launched two burgers with black buns, cheese, and sauce in Japan. The response from American consumers was very negative, with Tweets like, “Finally #BurgerKing makes a burger the way your body sees it ... disgusting and cancer-causing.” However, the black burgers were a success in Japan, which may be attributed to pre-existing cultural exposure to black foods such as squid ink, seaweed, and black walnut powder. Meanwhile, in the U.S. the color black is associated with death, disease, mold, and rancidity, prompting Americans to [make assumptions not only regarding taste, but connect the black burgers to nutritional deficiencies.](#)<sup>1</sup> Understanding how color affects perceptions of nutrition amongst specific groups of consumers can help food manufacturers use color measurement to maximize appeal in today’s health-conscious marketplace.

## Perceived Nutrition of Breads Based on Color

The effect of color on perceptions of nutrition has been known for decades. In 1977, a study at the University of Texas at Austin asked 270 middle-class housewives to rate the perceived nutritional value of breads with colors ranging from light to dark.<sup>2</sup> Researchers found the color of the bread was more important in informing perceptions of nutritional value than the nutritional label itself and that dark breads were assumed to be the most nutritious even when the ingredients in all the bread types were identical. Which color is perceived as the healthiest will depend on the specific type of food, of course, but as a general guide, researchers from Texas Tech University found that green, orange, and red foods were perceived as especially healthy while white, purple, and brown foods ranked much lower in healthfulness perception.<sup>3</sup>

## Packaging Color Affects Perceptions of Healthfulness

However, it is not just the color of the food product itself that influences perceptions of nutrition; food packaging can play a major role in forming consumer opinions and purchasing choices. In response to an increasingly health-conscious public, many food manufacturers are now placing key nutritional information on the front of their packaging. A 2013 study by researchers at Cornell, published in *Health Communication*, examined how these nutrition label colors affect perceptions of healthfulness by giving participants candy bars with either a green, red, or white calorie label.<sup>4</sup> The candy bars with green calorie labels were perceived to be healthier than those with red or white labels, even when the labels displayed identical calorie content. Study participants who identified as health-conscious were especially likely to identify products with green labels as nutritionally superior. A similar study from the Netherlands found that crisp bread with brown packaging was perceived to be healthier than identical crisp bread with yellow packaging.<sup>5</sup> Smartly designed packaging with appealing color palettes that signal health can draw consumers towards your product and shape the perception of your brand.

Full article with photos available here:

<https://www.hunterlab.com/blog/color-food-industry/in-the-eye-of-the-beholder-using-color-measurement-to-influence-perception-of-nutritional-value/>