



# “Eat your fruits and vegetables”

Manga comics get the message across to kids

Getting preteens to eat healthy foods and increase their physical activity can be a daunting task in today’s fast-food, multimedia world, but nutrition researcher and School alumna May May Leung, PhD, RD, has developed an innovative strategy to capture their attention – manga comics.

Dominating book sales in China and pumping nearly \$100 million into the U.S. comic book industry, the popular Japanese comic art form known as manga could have potential to promote behavior change in youth, Leung says.

“Often, interventions don’t properly engage or maintain the interest of the intended population,” she says, “so I looked for a model already successful at engaging my target population.”

Leung evaluated manga comics and conducted research with preteens in four North Carolina counties. She asked the youths what they liked about manga and how they felt about specific health concepts. She then collaborated with local artist Kris Hoyt to create and test a manga comic called “Zen Aku: Fight for

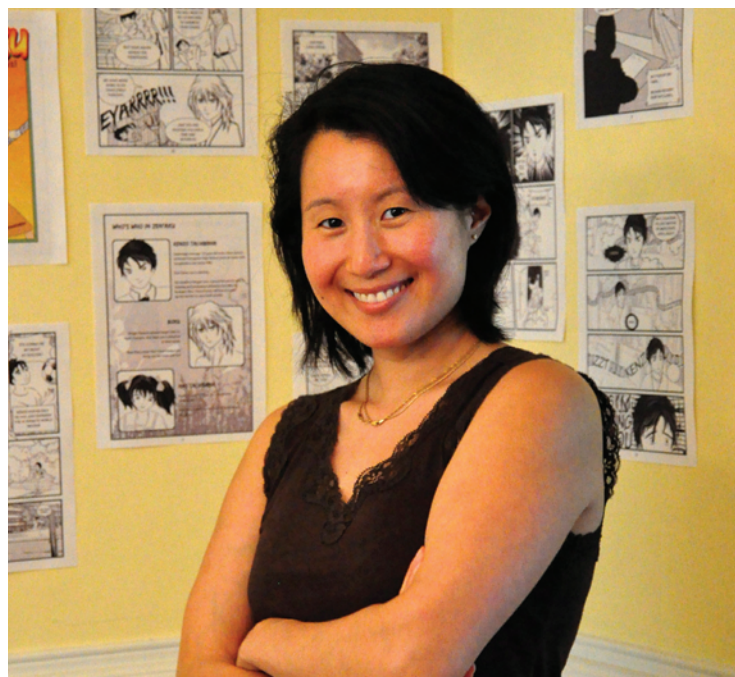


PHOTO BY KRIS HOYT

Dr. May May Leung used manga comics, a popular Japanese comic art form, to encourage preteens to make healthy food choices.

## Your Right to Fruit.”

“The characters are drawn in a simplified manner, allowing more people to identify with them, which could create a greater level of audience involvement,” Leung says. “And because manga comics are sold as entertainment, readers may be more likely to be persuaded by the story’s health messages.”

Leung’s research, which has been submitted for publication, showed that young people who read the manga comic significantly increased their beliefs in the importance of fruit intake when compared to a group that was given the same information in a nutrition newsletter.

Alice Ammerman, DrPH, RD, Leung’s adviser, agrees that the results are promising, as increased belief in the importance of fruit intake may result in changing behavior to consume more fruit.

Now a tenure-track assistant professor at The City University of New York School of Public Health at Hunter College, Leung envisions taking that next step with future research and plans to extend her experiment to other populations.

–Chris Perry



ILLUSTRATION BY KRIS HOYT