

Do low-fat foods make us fat?

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Recent Cornell studies in movie theatres, holiday receptions, and homes showed people eat an average of 28% more total calories when they eat low-fat snacks than regular ones. "Obese people can eat up to 45% more," reports lead researcher Brian Wansink (Ph.D.), in the book, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*.

"People don't realize that low-fat foods are not always low-calorie foods," says Wansink. Fat is often replaced with sugar. Low-fat snacks are an average of 11% lower in calories, but people wrongly believe they are around 40% lower.

In one study, two groups of people attending a holiday open-house were given identical regular chocolates that were labeled as either "Regular" or as "Low-fat." People served themselves an average of a third more of the candies, which would have translated into 28% more calories if they had actually been low-fat. A second study showed this is because "people believe they will feel less guilty eating the low-fat foods, so they tend to overindulge, says Pierre Chandon, co-author and marketing professor at INSEAD in France. Fat is often replaced with sugar.

The complete set of research studies, published in the November issue of the *Journal of Marketing Research*, was cited by the *Economist* as one of two significant noteworthy studies published that month. It is titled, "Can 'Low-Fat' Foods Lead to Obesity?"

For policy makers and companies, the message is that new "low-fat" foods are unlikely to solve the obesity solution. People are very likely to

over eat a low-fat foods – even if they don't like them as much as the regular versions.

For dieters, there's also clear message. As Wansink advises in the book *Mindless Eating*, "Stick with the regular version, but eat a little bit less. It's better for both your diet and your taste buds."

Source: Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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