

Making snack food choices

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People who are asked whether they would choose between a "good" snack and a "bad" snack might not follow their intentions when the snacks arrive. In an article in the September/October 2008 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Dutch researchers found that there is a substantial inconsistency between healthful snack choice intentions and actual behavior.

Participants were asked about their intentions in choosing among four snacks: an apple, a banana, a candy bar and a molasses waffle. About half of the participants indicated they would choose the apple or banana—a "healthy" snack.

But when presented, one week later, with the actual snacks, 27% switched to the candy bar or waffle. Over 90% of the unhealthy-choice participants stuck with their intentions and chose the unhealthy snack. The study included 585 participants who were office employees recruited in their worksite cafeterias.

Although intentions are often tightly linked to what people really do, it doesn't always work that way. One explanation is that intentions are usually under cognitive control while actual choices are often made impulsively, even unconsciously.

At times, the link between intentions and behavior is stronger. In healthy eating behavior, a strong positive attitude toward healthy eating, a high level of dietary restraint and regular consumption of healthy foods could increase the healthy intention-behavior consistency.

Investigator Pascal Weizzen, Division of Human Nutrition, Wageningen University, The Netherlands, comments that "a substantial gap between healthy snack choice intentions and actual behavior was demonstrated. Despite that gap, the results suggest that individuals who plan to make a healthful choice are more likely to do so than those who plan to make unhealthy choices. Because more than 50% of the population seems to have no intention at all of making a healthful choice, identifying tools by which this group can be motivated to choose a healthful snack is strongly needed."

Source: Elsevier

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