

'Avoid compensatory intentions when dieting,' scientists say

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(PhysOrg.com) -- When it comes to successful dieting, avoid giving in to any temptation in the moment, with the intention to make up for it later on. McGill University professor Bärbel Knäuper, of the Department of Psychology and her team discovered that forming compensatory intentions when dieting may be detrimental to weight loss because it "allows" dieters to indulge, thinking they'll make up for the indulgence "later" but inevitably they don't, and end up keeping the extra calories.

Diets work best when compensatory intentions are not acceptable from the start. The team's findings were published in the journal *Appetite*. The study was made up of 42 women participants and examined how dieters dealt with temptations.

The McGill team created a scenario in which dieters were given the choice of either eating a tempting cookie or an untempting cookie. Then they were asked to report any compensatory intentions they formed while deciding which cookie they wanted to eat. When dieters were tempted by a high calorie food they formed plans to make up for eating it such as; "I'll skip dinner"; "I'll cut back later". These rationalizations or compensatory intentions were formed, so that they could eat the cookie and not feel guilty about breaking their diet.

"There are many ways in which dieters manage [temptation](#), said Ilana Kronick, McGill Ph.D. student. "Typically, they will either resist it with an increase in willpower or give-in by adopting defeatist or rebellious attitudes". A third option is to give in to temptation with the promise to

make up for it later. [Dieters](#) who use this type of thinking believe in the ability to compensate for indulgence with later behaviors, such as skipping dinner, but this doesn't happen.

According to Knäuper, people should not form compensatory intentions because they lead to failure. "Refrain from indulging in compensatory intentions so that you may indulge, because it rarely balances out in the end as you had planned."

Provided by McGill University

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