

Hopeful consumers choose fruit, happy consumers choose candy bars

February 20 2012, By Lori Wilson



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many people fall victim to emotional eating, but it doesn't happen only when they're feeling bad, according to researchers.

Having a good day at work, for example, can sometimes lead to a [candy bar](#) treat from the [vending machine](#), according to Karen Winterich,

assistant professor of marketing, Penn State Smeal College of Business, and Kelly Haws of Texas A&M University. At other times, [positive feelings](#) lead to choosing a healthier option, such as fruit.

Previous research has shown that feeling bad can lead to bad eating choices, but Winterich and Haws show that feeling good doesn't necessarily lead to good eating choices.

The researchers looked at the complicated relationship between positive emotions and food consumption, aiming to determine when positive feelings lead to unhealthy snacking. They teased out the difference between positive feelings -- pride and happiness -- that arise from thinking about the past or present, and hope, which they describe as a more future-oriented emotion.

In four studies, Winterich and Haws found that participants focusing their positive emotion toward the future consume less unhealthy food and have lower preferences for unhealthy snacks than those whose feelings of pride or happiness are focused on the past.

In the researchers' first study, hopeful participants consumed fewer M&M candies than people who experienced happiness. In a second study, even when feeling hopeful, participants who were more focused on the past chose unhealthy snacks.

The researchers shifted the time frame of the positive emotion in the third study, questioning participants on a time when they had anticipated being rewarded for a particular achievement. The results indicate that if someone is anticipating feeling proud, they prefer fewer unhealthy snacks than someone experiencing a present sense of pride.

Finally, the authors compared future-focused positive emotions of hopefulness and anticipated pride with future-focused negative emotions

of fear, and anticipated shame. They found that only the combination of positivity and a future-focused state of mind improved self-control.

Details of their study appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal for Consumer Research*.

"The next time you're feeling well, don't focus too much on all the good things in the past," the researchers wrote. "Instead, keep that positive glow and focus on your future, especially all the good things you imagine to come. Your waistline will thank you!"

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Hopeful consumers choose fruit, happy consumers choose candy bars (2012, February 20) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-02-consumers-fruit-happy-candy-bars.html>

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