

# No benefits ensue from snack learning

October 17 2013, by Timothy Oliver

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“We provided jellybeans—we wanted to see whether people in what we thought would be a more ego-depleting situation would eat more sugary foods,” Prof Dimmock. Credit: Gret Sher

A recent experiment involving University of Western Australia students suggests snacking while studying does not improve academic performance.

[The study](#) also found [students](#) in a controlled learning environment had less control over their ability to control the impulse to snack.

Three groups were observed; students in an autonomous learning environment with provision of snacks, and students in a controlled learning environment both with and without the provision of snacks.

UWA Associate Professor James Dimmock says the human brain can be thought of as having a pool of self-control resources.

"You can take out all the resources to a point where the pool runs dry in which case you no longer have any resources for self-control and are unable to resist a temptation," he says.

"So, the idea of the study was to determine whether learning climate conditions have an effect on the way we might snack and on our ego-depletion—the level of self control that we have."

He says people think the brain uses more energy fighting self-instinct and that this energy can be replenished through the consumption of sugary foods.

"So we provided jellybeans—we wanted to see whether people in what we thought would be a more ego-depleting situation would eat more sugary foods," he says.

"The people in the controlled learning condition ate more [sugary foods](#) than the people in the autonomous learning condition."

He says participating students were also subjected to a secondary ego-depletion task to determine the relative [self-control](#) resources used.

"Our task at the end was called an e-hunt [where students] had to cross off every letter 'e' in a reading but only after some conditions so not, for instance, following the letter 'c'," he says.

"It's mentally taxing; you can make mistakes pretty easily."

The students in the controlled [learning environment](#) performed poorly in the e-hunt task, regardless of sugar intake.

"We didn't find support for the notion that sugar helps us to top up this self-regulatory resource that we have," he says.

"The overall message is that snacking on high-sugar food is not good from any perspective."

Provided by Science Network WA

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