

Looking at a low-calorie recipe results in purchase of fewer snacks

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(Medical Xpress)—People who are overweight purchase on average 75% fewer unhealthy snacks in the supermarket if they see a recipe card at the supermarket entrance that contains references to a slim figure. This is the conclusion of NWO-funded researcher Esther Papies from Utrecht University based on an experiment in the supermarket. She has published her research results in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

The one hundred [participants](#) in the study each received a recipe card at the entrance of the supermarket. For half of the participants the start of the recipe contained words associated with a slim figure such as, 'healthy and good for your figure: extra low-calorie recipe'. The other half the participants received a card with the same recipe but then with more neutral words such as 'new recipe idea'. The researcher discovered that [overweight](#) people purchased, on average, 75% fewer unhealthy snacks (such as crisps, sweets and chocolate) if they had seen words related to the slim figure at the top of the recipe than people with overweight who had read the neutral words. This effect even occurred if they had no longer thought about the slim figure recipe card during shopping. It would therefore seem that exposure to this recipe card subconsciously steered the participants towards healthier choices.

Subtle target memory

Seeing the healthy recipe card only had an effect on people who were overweight. People who had a normal weight exhibited the same

purchasing behaviour for snacks irrespective of the type of recipe card they were shown. According to the researcher, the healthy recipe card acted as a subtle memory aid for people who are overweight. 'By looking at the card, certain information might have been subconsciously activated in the memory: in this case, a prior intention to consume fewer calories. Study subjects subsequently acted by purchasing fewer snacks,' says Papies. Photo of receipt

About half the participants in the experiments were overweight and nearly all of the participants were women. Participants knew beforehand that they would take part in a study but they did not know what the aim of this study was or what the researchers would pay attention to. Once the participants had paid for the shopping, the researchers took a photo of the receipt to see how many [unhealthy snacks](#) participants had purchased and how much money they had spent on these. The researchers also asked the participants whether they were in a hurry and/or felt hungry while doing the shopping and for how many people they had done the shopping. Participants stated their weight and it was also recorded whether the study subjects were on a diet and whether they had thought about the recipe card while doing the shopping.

Reminder at the top of the shopping list

The experiment is part of Papies' Veni research project, in which she is studying different techniques for understanding and inhibiting the motivation to eat unhealthily. Based on the results from this experiment, the researcher expects that consumers who want to eat more healthily would benefit from writing a reminder sentence at the top of their [shopping](#) lists such as: 'Think about a healthy weight'.

More information: The paper is available online:
[www.nature.com/ijo/journal/v38 ... ull/ijo2013136a.html](http://www.nature.com/ijo/journal/v38...ull/ijo2013136a.html)

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