

Study suggests fast food cues hurt ability to savor experience

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Want to be able to smell the roses? You might consider buying into a neighbourhood where there are more sit-down restaurants than fast-food outlets, suggests a new paper from the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

The paper looks at how exposure to fast food can push us to be more impatient and that this can undermine our ability to smell the preverbal roses.

One study, surveyed a few hundred respondents throughout the US on their ability to savor a variety of realistic, enjoyable experiences such as discovering a beautiful waterfall on a hike. Based upon their zip codes, the researchers linked participants' responses to objective information from the most recent US Economic Census on the concentration of fast-food restaurants in their neighborhood relative to sit-down restaurants. The findings revealed that people living in communities with higher prevalence of fast-food restaurants were significantly less able to enjoy pleasurable activities that require savoring, even when controlling for economic factors of the individual and the neighborhood. The study's authors propose that's because fast food can incite people to feel more impatient, diminishing their ability to slow down and savour life's simpler joys.

"If you want to raise kids where they're less impatient, they're able to smell the roses, they're able to delay gratification, then you should choose to live in a neighbourhood where there is a lower concentration

of [fast food restaurants](#)," said Sanford DeVoe, an associate professor of organizational behavior and [human resource management](#) at the Rotman School, who co-wrote the paper with fellow Julian House, a Rotman PhD student, and Chen-Bo Zhong, an associate professor of [organizational behavior](#) and human resource management.

The researchers also conducted two experiments to evaluate whether the associations with fast food has a causal effect on people's ability to smell the roses. Pictorial reminders of fast food in its ready to go packaging were enough to raise people's impatience and interfere with their subsequent enjoyment of photos of natural beauty or an operatic aria.

However, study participants shown pictures of the same meals on regular ceramic tableware—the kind you might use at home—showed higher levels of enjoyment when experiencing these savoring activities.

The results "are counter-intuitive," said Prof. DeVoe. "We think about [fast food](#) as saving us time and freeing us up to do the things that we want to do. But because it instigates this sense of impatience, there are a whole set of activities where it becomes a barrier to our enjoyment of them."

The findings indicate the importance of thinking more carefully about the cues we're exposed to in our everyday environments—including workplaces—and how they can affect our psychology, he said.

The paper was published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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