

Study links TV use and unhealthy eating

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Temple Northup. Credit: University of Houston

The holidays can be a time for binge watching TV shows or movies. According to a University of Houston (UH) researcher, all of those hours in front of the television may lead to increased snacking.

A recent UH study conducted by professor Temple Northup suggests people who watch excessive amounts of TV tend to [eat](#) more unhealthy foods and might not understand the foundations of a healthy diet.

"A number of previous studies found a relationship between TV use in terms of the number of hours watched per day and unhealthy food consumption," said Northup, assistant professor at UH's Jack J. Valenti

School of Communication. "In essence, the number of hours of TV you watch per day, the more unhealthy foods you eat. A common explanation for this is that TV watching is sedentary and encourages snacking."

Northup documents the relationship between television use and unhealthy food consumption in the study, "Understanding the Relationship Between Television Use and Unhealthy Eating: The Mediating Role of Fatalistic Views of Eating Well and Nutritional Knowledge." This study recently was published in the *International Journal of Communication and Health*.

"There was very little prior research on the psychological reasons this relationship might exist beyond that it's a sedentary activity that encourages snacking," he said "I wanted to investigate underlying psychological reasons that this relationship might exist."

A 'fatalistic view toward eating well' and 'nutritional knowledge' are two of the measurements Northup included in a cross-sectional survey of 591 participants. He also included 'television and news media usage' and 'nutritional intake.' Northup says the research model is based on similar measures that look at cancer prevention.

In a review of the cancer prevention studies, Northup found that people who adopt a fatalistic view towards cancer, a view that it is too difficult to understand causes of cancer well enough to do anything about it—tend to have lower self-efficacy toward reducing risky behaviors that may cause cancer. In the context of TV use and [unhealthy eating](#), he believed that those with a more fatalistic view toward eating well tend to eat more snack foods. If these individuals think nutrition is too difficult to understand, they will probably give up trying to eat well, he said.

"I found people who watch more TV had both a poorer understanding of

proper nutrition and a more fatalistic view toward eating well compared to those who watched less TV. In turn, those two items predicted snacking behaviors," said Northup. "It is important to understand how people develop knowledge about nutrition, including examining nutritional messages found within the media."

Northup suggests that because consumers are inundated with advertising for [unhealthy food](#) and messages about the latest trends in what you should (or shouldn't) eat, they develop these poor attitudes toward and knowledge about eating well.

More information: The study is available online at [communicationandhealth.ro/uplo... 3/TEMPLE-NORTHUP.pdf](#)

Provided by University of Houston

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