

An apple a day brings more apples your way

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Credit: Cornell Food & Brand Lab

We have all been told not to grocery shop on an empty stomach, but

what other tips can help us shop, and consequently eat, healthier? Cornell researchers Aner Tal, PhD and Brian Wansink, PhD ([author](#) of *Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life*) found that shoppers can be primed to buy more produce when they eat a healthy item before shopping. In fact, their new research, published in *Psychology & Marketing*, found that individuals who ate an apple sample before shopping bought 25% more fruits and vegetables than those who did not eat a sample!

Tal and Wansink conducted three studies to test their hypothesis that healthy snacks prime shoppers to make healthier food selections. In the first study, 120 shoppers were randomly given an apple sample, a cookie sample or no sample at the start of their [shopping](#) trip. The researchers then tracked their purchases and found that those who were given the apple sample bought 28% more fruits and vegetables than those given a cookie sample and 25% more fruits and vegetables than those given no sample. "What this teaches us," Tal explains, "is that having a small healthy snack before shopping can put us in a healthier mindset and steer us towards making better food choices."

In the second and third study, participants shopped virtually. In study two 56 participants were given an actual cookie or apple sample then asked to imagine they were [grocery shopping](#). They were then shown 20 product pairs and directed to select which one they would purchase. Each pair contained one healthy (low-calorie) item and one unhealthy (high-calorie) item. As in the previous study, those who ate the apple opted for healthier items. Interestingly, those who ate a cookie opted for a greater amount of less healthy items. The third study sought to see if just framing a sample as healthy or not influences subsequent shopping behavior. 59 participants were divided randomly into three groups. Group one was given chocolate milk labeled "healthy, wholesome chocolate milk," group two was given the same milk but labeled, "rich, indulgent [chocolate milk](#)," and the final group did not receive any milk.

All participants were asked to make food selections in a virtual grocery store that contained a variety of healthy (low-calorie) and unhealthy (high-calorie) options. Participants who were given the milk labeled healthy and wholesome selected more healthy foods in the virtual grocery store. This finding indicates that what influences shoppers behavior after consuming a sample is not the actual healthfulness of the sample but its perceived healthfulness.

In conclusion, for consumers, the researchers recommend having a small [healthy snack](#) like a piece of fruit before shopping. Not only will it help decrease hunger, it may also nudge you to select healthier items. For grocery stores they recommend leveraging these findings and encouraging people to buy more produce by offering samples of [fruits and vegetables](#) to [shoppers](#) upon entering the store!

More information: Tal, Aner, Brian Wansink (2015). An Apple a Day Brings More Apples Your Way: Healthy Samples Prime Healthier Choices. *Psychology & Marketing*, forthcoming.
[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 2/mar.20801/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.20801/abstract)

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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