

# Don't even talk about it: 'Food words' can make you overeat

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Stress and genetics also make some crave high-calorie foods, but obese people are more apt to indulge, research finds.

(HealthDay)—Certain food words can interact with stress and genetics to trigger unhealthy eating, two new studies suggest.

The findings were presented this week at Obesity Week, a meeting in Los Angeles hosted by the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery and The Obesity Society.

One study included 17 [obese people](#) and 12 normal-weight people whose brain activity was monitored while they looked at words describing high- and low-calorie foods.

"Our study found that individuals with obesity had a stronger response to words associated with high-calorie foods—such as chocolate spread and

chicken wings—in a widespread neural circuit spanning multiple areas of the brain," study leader Susan Carnell said in Obesity Society news release.

Stress made the obese participants more likely to want high-calorie foods.

"When we subjected individuals to a combined social and physiological stressor, both individuals with obesity and those of normal weight showed slightly altered responses to high-calorie [food](#) words, but only those with obesity ate more at a subsequent meal," said Carnell. She is an assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

She said this suggests that obese people respond to food cues differently than lean people, which could lead them to eat more.

In the second study, Carnell and colleagues found a link between responses to food words and [obesity risk](#) in teens with genetic variants that increase the risk of obesity.

"Our study provides additional insight into how these particular obesity-associated genetic variants may be working—by increasing appetite and food intake," study research coordinator Leora Benson said in the news release.

The findings could lead to new ways to combat [obesity](#), the researchers said.

"It may be possible to train our brains to react differently to certain food cues," Obesity Society spokesman Martin Binks said in the news release.

"This research is a step toward better understanding how food

words—relatively minimal food cues—may influence food consumption and how other common experiences like stress may interact with associated food cues to influence eating behavior. These types of studies may eventually lead to more effective behavioral strategies," he said.

Studies presented at meetings are not subject to the same scrutiny given to published research and are generally considered preliminary.

**More information:** The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute has more about [obesity prevention](#).

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