

# Healthy theme park meals?

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# THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE OF EATING

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We've collected the newest thinking from 30 consumer behavior researchers into the inaugural issue of the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research.

## I. HUNGER AND SATIETY



**SKIP DINNER IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY:** Spikes in your blood sugar can lead to weight gain.<sup>1</sup>



**DON'T CALL IT HEALTHY:** You overeat food called "healthy" because you think it's less filling.<sup>2</sup>



**MAKE LESS - WASTE LESS:** Low-income families prepare too much food in fear of "running out."<sup>3</sup>



**MIRRORS = MINDFULNESS:** Kitchen mirrors make you dislike unhealthy food.<sup>4</sup>

## II. SHOPPING AND DINING



**HAPPY MEALS CAN BE HEALTHY MEALS:** Brain scans show that small prizes keep you happy when eating less food.<sup>5</sup>



**DISNEY HELPS DIETS:** When juice and fruit came with meals, Disney World goers consumed 11-24% more of them.<sup>6</sup>



**READ CAREFULLY:** Per-serving calorie labels can lead to mindless overeating.<sup>7</sup>



**SLICE SMALLER:** Smaller portions (and bigger tables) lead to smaller meals.<sup>8</sup>



**FOOD PANTRY SOLUTIONS:** Behavioral economics in food pantries lead to healthier shopping.<sup>9</sup>

## III. MINDLESSLY EATING BETTER



**USE SMALL PLATES:** You serve 20-25% less when using small plates - but only if a researcher is not watching!<sup>10</sup>



**THE LESS FANCY THE PLATE,** the Less You'll Eat. We may eat the least off paper plates.<sup>11</sup>



**FORKS OVER SPOONS:** Forks (versus spoons) make you overestimate calories.<sup>12</sup>



**AVOID NEGATIVE MESSAGES:** Telling dieters "Don't eat cookies" can double how much they eat. Use 2-sided messages instead.<sup>13</sup>

## IV. THE FUTURE OF FOOD RESEARCH

FROM FRINGE TO FOCUS:

The Behavioral Science of Eating: Encouraging Boundary Research that has Impact<sup>14</sup>

Boundary Research: Tools and Rules to Impact Emerging Fields<sup>15</sup>



LEARN MORE AND WATCH THE VIDEOS  
[FOODPSYCHOLOGY.CORNELL.EDU/JACR](http://FOODPSYCHOLOGY.CORNELL.EDU/JACR)



- <sup>1</sup> Gal, JACR 2016
- <sup>2</sup> Suher, Raghunathan & Hoyer, JACR 2016
- <sup>3</sup> Porpino, JACR 2016
- <sup>4</sup> Jami, JACR 2016
- <sup>5</sup> Reimann, MacInnis & Bechara, JACR 2016
- <sup>6</sup> Peters, Beck, Lande, Pan, Cardel, Ayoob & Hill, JACR 2016
- <sup>7</sup> Elshiewy, Jahn & Boztug, JACR 2016
- <sup>8</sup> Davis, Payne & Bui, JACR 2016
- <sup>9</sup> Wilson, JACR 2016
- <sup>10</sup> Holden, Zlatevska & Dubelaar, JACR 2016
- <sup>11</sup> Williamson, Block & Keller, JACR 2016
- <sup>12</sup> Szocs & Biswas, JACR 2016
- <sup>13</sup> Pham, Mandel & Morales, JACR 2016
- <sup>14</sup> Van Ittersum & Wansink, JACR 2016
- <sup>15</sup> Wansink & van Ittersum, JCB 2016

Credit: Brian Wansink

When meals at Disney World restaurants came with a fruit or vegetables instead of fries, about half of diners opted to keep the healthier option! A new study published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* shows that nutritionally improved kid's meals at the 145 restaurants located at Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida were embraced by diners.

Starting in 2006 the Walt Disney Company began improving the nutritional quality of kid's meals by replacing the default sides and beverages of French Fries and regular soda with healthy defaults of [low fat milk](#) or water and either fruit or vegetables. Customers could still request soda and fries if they chose to "opt out" of the healthy default items. To better understand the acceptability and nutritional impact of making these dramatic changes Disney recently provided kid's meal sales data for the years 2010-2012 to the University of Colorado Anschutz Health and Wellness Center for detailed analysis. The results were dramatic and showed that across all restaurants, 48% and 66% of guests accepted healthy default sides and beverages, respectively. The healthy defaults reduced calories (21.4%), fat (43.9%) and sodium (43.4%) for kid's meal sides and beverages. Disney further reported that improving the [nutritional quality](#) of the meals did not affect the consumer cost of the meals.

This research is important because it highlights a voluntary and bold move by a large company to make changes that can help improve nutrition for their customers but that doesn't restrict choice and doesn't increase cost. It makes purchasing the healthier item the easy choice in a

way that is a win-win for both consumer and restaurant. "While these results were obtained in a theme park setting they may have broader applicability and may encourage other restaurants to try the opt-out approach for making healthier choices easier for consumers." Says lead author, John C. Peters.

This article is published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* entitled "The Behavioral Science of Eating."

**More information:** John C. Peters, Jimikaye Beck, Jan Lande, Zhaoxing Pan, Michelle Cardel, Keith Ayoob, and James Hill (2016). Using Healthy Defaults in Walt Disney World Restaurants to Improve Nutritional Choices. *The Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1.

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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