

# **Small units on a big surface = fewer calories**

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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

How does the size of the table we eat at influence how much we eat? This is the question that researchers posed and answered in a new study published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*. They found that table size does have a significant impact on how people perceive the food it holds and consequently how much people eat.

For the study, the researchers divided four large round pizza pies of the same size into regular-sized slices (eighths) or smaller slices (sixteenths). They then placed two pies on small tables that were just a little bigger than a pizza pie. And they placed the other two pies on large tables that were much bigger than a pizza pie. They then directed 219 university students to one of the four tables and invited them to take as much pizza as they would like to [eat](#).

Those at small tables were right in thinking that smaller slices looked about half as big as regular ones, and they took about twice as many. In contrast, people at large tables paid more attention to how big the table was instead of how small the pizza slices were. In other words, the large tables distracted them and they presumed the smaller slices were more regular in [size](#). As a result, people who saw a pizza pie with smaller slices took about same number as those who saw one with regular slices when served on a large table. This meant they ate at lot less pizza overall.

In summary, [people](#) ate the fewest overall calories when a pizza pie was cut into smaller slices and then placed on a large table. "To eat less food," lead researcher Brennan Davis recommends, "serve food in small portions and on large tables."

**More information:** Davis, Brennan, Collin R. Payne and My Bui (2016). Making Small Food Units Seem "Regular:" How Larger Table Size Reduces Calories to be Consumed. *The Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1.

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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