

Does a sweet tooth affect sugar intake?

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Study results suggest sweet taste sensitivity has a key role to play in whether a person develops a habit for sweet foods. Credit: Massey University

It has long been known taste plays an important role in many of our food choices, but what if we knew whether having a so-called "sweet tooth" did indeed lead to a sugar habit?

PhD student Shakeela Jayasinghe, from Massey University's School of Food and Nutrition, has unraveled new insights into the mysteries of sweet [food intake](#).

Ms Jayasinghe says while sugar consumption creates pleasure, excessive sugar leads to weight gain and obesity. "There are variations in sweet taste sensitivity between individuals, which then influences their diet. I wanted to better understand the relationship between sensitivity to sweet taste, and sweet food intake, for new insights into people's [food choices](#)."

The cross-sectional study looked at the relationship between [sweet taste perception](#) and the sweet food intake of healthy women aged 20-40 years. Sweet [taste perception](#) was assessed by rating sweet intensity and liking of different glucose concentrations. In addition, participants completed dietary questionnaires about their sweet food intake and how much they liked sweet drinks.

Study results suggest sweet taste sensitivity has a key role to play in whether a person develops a habit for sweet foods. Those sensitive to sweetness at the highest level (1000mM glucose) were less inclined to like juices or to eat sweet foods often, while those less sensitive tended to like fruit juice and sweet fruits as well as baking, sweets and [sweet drinks](#).

In addition, women who preferred to snack on sweet items perceived 1000mM glucose as less sweet. Although the study did not find differences in sweet taste sensitivity or sweetness liking between participants with and without a [sweet tooth](#), those who reported having a sweet tooth more frequently consumed baking, chocolate and soft lollies.

Ms Jayasinghe presented these results at the 13th International Congress on Obesity, in Vancouver, Canada last month. Her PhD supervisor,

Professor Bernhard Breier, says this signals a significant recognition of the study's findings as promising in understanding the role taste perception plays in food intake.

"The discovery that [sweet taste](#) intensity perception influences habitual sweet food intake will guide future intervention studies involving novel dietary approaches [or foods] to support population groups at risk of metabolic disease and obesity," Professor Breier says.

Provided by Massey University

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