

Do red Smarties make you happier? 'Live the trial' class debunks the myth

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Professor Philip Baker used Smarties in a mock clinical trial to test if the red ones made you happier while teaching health professionals and students the challenges of conducting quality research. Credit: Anthony Weate/QUT Media

A test to assess the effect of red Smarties on happiness has been used to

teach the often "dull" or "boring" concepts of clinical research.

The study, published in the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health*, was based on a mock randomised control trial (RCT) across three countries and involved students at QUT and [health professionals](#) in Canada and Malaysia.

Health professionals and students who were learning to understand what makes good research and how clinical [trials](#) are run became the participants in the study.

They were given a package at the start of the lecture which included a programmed infrared clicker to collect data and a small fun pack of unseen Smarties that were either red or yellow.

Their level of [happiness](#) was recorded on a scale of 1-10 at the start and end of the lecture, during which they blindly consumed the chocolate while observed by a fellow participant.

Lead researcher QUT Professor Philip Baker said it was interesting that the results found eating red Smarties had no impact on happiness over the yellow candy-coated chocolate.

"Red is often associated with feelings of happiness and the trial tested this assumption," Professor Baker said.

"We had hypothesised if the lecture was boring or difficult to understand and it would have resulted in a significant loss in happiness in all groups, however, the happiness data indicated that the participants' mood remained unchanged.

"This debunks the myth that red Smarties increase happiness and as a result a 'lived in' trial can turn a complex epidemiology lecture into an

interesting teaching technique.

"It also shows that epidemiology and the study of research methods can be fun and engaging."

Professor Baker from QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation joined Faculty of Health's Associate Professor Daniel Francis and QUT Business School Professor Abby Cathcart in the development and design of the trial.

He said the mock trial illustrated the importance of minimising bias and the challenges of conducting quality research using a hands-on and visual approach.

Professor Philip Baker said the aim was to apply and assess an authentic teaching approach to epidemiology and critical appraisal - with learners as participants rather than "just lecturing at students".

"Students get involved in the clinical trial and thereby learn complex scientific techniques first-hand in a fun way," Professor Baker said.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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