

Your choice in exercise can lead to healthier eating

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Credit: University of Western Australia

Researchers at The University of Western Australia have found that people who have no choice in the exercise they do are more likely to eat unhealthy food afterwards.

The study, published in *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* found those who had the ability to choose what exercise they engaged in enjoyed the session more and made healthier [food](#) choices.

The study involved 58 men and women with half given free choice about their [exercise session](#). The other half, who were matched on variables such as sex, age, height, weight and fitness were told they had to exercise under conditions chosen by someone else.

The exercise choices given to participants included the mode of exercise (bike or treadmill), intensity and duration (between 30 and 60 minutes), the time of commencement, and the option to listen to music of their choosing.

After the session participants were provided a buffet-style breakfast which included a variety of healthy and unhealthy foods, while unwittingly being monitored by researchers.

Natalya Beer from UWA's School of Human Sciences said taking away choice during exercise seemed to increase the likelihood of people eating unhealthy foods afterwards.

"We saw participants who had their exercise chosen for them consumed almost double the amount of energy from unhealthy foods compared to those who had choice," Ms Beer said.

"Unsurprisingly, we also found that giving people [choice](#) in their exercise session resulted in them having higher levels of enjoyment and perceived value, which may encourage them to continue to be healthy and active."

"There is strong evidence that the behaviours we are seeing may be a result of conscious processing, such as licensing. That is, the justification of rewarding a healthy behaviour with an unhealthy behaviour," Ms Beer said.

"The message is simple – choose exercise you enjoy and you might feel less of an urge to reward yourself with [unhealthy food](#) when you finish."

The researchers hope to further explore ways to optimise the effects of [exercise](#) on appetite regulation and uncover the mechanisms involved with this type of eating behaviour.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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