

How other people's looks affect what we eat

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Credit: University of Surrey

When you next pop into a café for a snack or lunch, you may not be aware of how your food choice is influenced by the appearance of the waitress or waiter.

A joint study by Sabine Benoit, Professor of Marketing at Surrey

Business School, ran an experiment to see how people compare themselves with others and how this may affect their eating behaviour. Volunteers wore eye-tracking equipment and watched a video of the same waitress in one of three conditions –healthy-looking, overweight or exhibiting signs of an unhealthy lifestyle (eg very pale skin, shadows under the eyes and clothing styles).

After seeing the video, the consumers were invited to look at a menu with healthy and unhealthy options and the eye-tracking equipment captured subconscious attraction to a particular [food](#). The results showed that the healthy and overweight waitress did not influence [food choice](#) but the waitress seen as having an [unhealthy lifestyle](#) triggered attraction towards unhealthy meals.

The findings could help inform public policy campaigns as the best way to promote healthy eating and encourage service companies to make sure that the corporate styling supports healthiness of the service employees' look rather than their body shape.

More information: Tabea Huneke et al. Does Service Employees' Appearance Affect the Healthiness of Food Choice?, *Psychology & Marketing* (2014). [DOI: 10.1002/mar.20765](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20765)

Provided by University of Surrey

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