Sprint-interval exercise may induce healthier food choices

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People who incorporate sprints into their exercise may be more likely to make healthier food choices after their workout, according to a new study by The University of Western Australia and James Cook

University.

The researchers studied 40 physically inactive men and women who took part in either sprint-interval exercise (short sprints separated by low-intensity breaks) or moderate-intensity continuous exercise across two cycling sessions, with each session matched for total work.

Lead author Natalya Beer said while exercising, participants either experienced a friendly, motivationally supportive social environment, or a no-support social environment.

"What we found was that the participants enjoyed the sprint-interval exercise more than the moderate-intensity continuous exercise, even though it required more exertion, and led to a higher heart rate and higher blood lactate," Ms Beer said.

Importantly, a key hormone related to hunger—ghrelin—was lower following the sprint interval exercise, and participants also consumed less food after sprint interval exercise in the supportive social environment, she said.

"Of course, we all know how tricky it is to exercise regularly and also maintain a healthy diet—such a lifestyle is, quite frankly, very challenging for many of us to achieve," Ms Beer said.

"But what our research shows is that if you're planning to exercise and you're also concerned about your diet, try to incorporate short sprints into your session—otherwise known as High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) – as opposed to moderate-intensity continuous training, such as riding a stationary bike or jogging at the same intensity.

"Also, try to undertake your interval exercise in a supportive social environment—surround yourself with friendly instructors and peers."

The study was published in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism*.

More information: Natalya Jane Beer et al. Interactions of sprint interval exercise and psychological need-support on subsequent food intake among physically inactive men and women, *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* (2020). DOI: 10.1139/apnm-2019-0672