

Women with a 'sweet tooth' more in tune with their bodies

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Credit: Jacqueline Brandwayn

Women who crave sweet taste sensations are more in tune with their bodies—and better able to tell when they feel full—than women with an aversion to the sweet stuff. That's according to new research from psychologists at the University of Sussex, published in the journal *Appetite*.

This counter-intuitive finding is from a study by Prof Martin Yeomans and Dr. Vasiliki Iatridi, experts in satiety and food psychology, who conducted a study with 64 participants.

The study observed people at each of the ends of the sweet-toothed spectrum, comparing 'sweet-likers' to 'sweet-dislikers'. Participants were

categorized as being 'sweet likers' or 'sweet-dislikers' after being asked to taste and rate sugar solutions of varying intensities.

Those taking part were initially fitted with heartbeat trackers. 'Sweet-likers' were found to be better able to sense their own heart-beats, without actually measuring their own pulses, than 'sweet-dislikers'. After this, participants were invited to drink water until they felt full. It was found that those classified as 'sweet-likers' were more able to tell when they were full—that is, they had better 'gastric interoceptive' abilities.

Sweet-likers also scored higher on mindful and intuitive eating scales. That means they were found to be less likely to be affected by the temptations of our modern day 'obesogenic environment', which is abundant in food.

Dr. Vasiliki Iatridi, who was a doctoral student from the School of Psychology at the University of Sussex during the study, is the lead author on the [research paper](#). She said:

"This study is interesting because it runs contrary to what many people might think. If you're partial to very sugary food, it doesn't mean that you're at the whim of your cravings. It might mean the opposite: that you're less likely to cave in to the call of the candy jar in the absence of hunger or a metabolic—i.e. real—need for carbohydrates."

"According to previous research in our lab, if you're someone who isn't keen on boiled sweets, then you might be classified as a 'sweet-disliker'. These are the people, we've found here, who are less able to curb their cravings."

"This research may in time open up new personalized nutrition strategies in helping people lose weight."

Professor Martin Yeomans from the School of Psychology at the University of Sussex oversaw the study. He said:

"It may seem counter-intuitive to some people, but we've found that women who are categorized as having a sweet-tooth are more in tune with their bodies, and more likely to know when they're full.

"From a scientific perspective, we know that individuals vary widely in how much they like sweet food. But it remains unknown whether this change relates to underlying differences in people's own interoceptive abilities—that is, the ability to read their own internal state. That covers things like how full their stomach is, and whether their body is telling them they need to eat.

"Our study shows that people who like sweet foods are able to detect the physical sensations which signal when they're full up. This runs counter to the view that sweet-liking causes overeating, since it suggests sweet-likers are better able to know when they are hungry or full, and that surprisingly it is those who don't like sweet tastes who may be less able to self-regulate their eating. What we still don't know is what makes someone a sweet-liker or disliker, and that is what we are now looking into."

This study only looked at [female participants](#) but it is hoped that further studies may also include men.

More information: Vasiliki Iatridi et al. Female sweet-likers have enhanced cross-modal interoceptive abilities, *Appetite* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2021.105290](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105290)

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