

Researchers find hunger pangs drive people to acquire more non-food objects

17 February 2015, by Bob Yirka



Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

(Medical Xpress)—A team of researchers with members from institutions in the U.S. and Hong Kong has found that when people feel hunger, in addition to attempting to quash their pangs by eating, they will also acquire more non-food items. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the team describes five laboratory and field studies they conducted that showed how people respond to non-food objects when they are hungry.

In the first study, the researchers asked volunteers to perform a word association task—some of the words on cards were related to acquisitions, others to food and others were not even real words. They were also asked before and after the tasks to rate how [hungry](#) they were. The data showed that people in the study were more likely to associate acquisition words with food words when they were hungry.

In the second study, the researchers stopped people entering or leaving a café (after eating) and asked them about their mood and how much they would like to buy certain items. They found that

those who had not yet eaten showed a marked desire to purchase certain non-food products.

In the third study, people at a store were asked if they would like some free binder clips to try—if so they were asked to answer a few other questions that involved how hungry they were. Participants were then asked how many clips they wanted. The researchers found that hungry people wanted more clips than those that were not hungry.

In the fourth study, the researchers asked volunteers to not eat prior to arriving for an experiment—they then asked them to participate in a cake taste test, which was followed by the same binder experiment in the third study. They found that the hungriest volunteers took the most free binder clips.

In the fifth study, the researchers queried 81 people who had just left a department store who allowed them to scan their shopping receipts and then answered questions about how hungry they were. The researchers found that those who shopped when hungry, tended to buy more non-food items than did those who were not hungry.

In reviewing all their data, the team found that while hunger clearly caused an increase in non-food acquisition, whether people had to pay for it or not, it did not increase the level of satisfaction experienced by those people that had acquired such things.

More information: Hunger promotes acquisition of nonfood objects, Alison Jing Xu, Norbert Schwarz, and Robert S. Wyer, Jr. *PNAS*, www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1417712112

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