

Eating when we are not hungry is bad for our health

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THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE OF EATING

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We've collected the newest thinking from 30 consumer behavior researchers into the inaugural issue of the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research.

I. HUNGER AND SATIETY



SKIP DINNER IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY: Spikes in your blood sugar can lead to weight gain. ¹



DON'T CALL IT HEALTHY: You overeat food called "healthy" because you think it's less filling. ²



MAKE LESS - WASTE LESS: Low-income families prepare too much food in fear of "running out." ³



MIRRORS = MINDFULNESS: Kitchen mirrors make you dislike unhealthy food. ⁴

II. SHOPPING AND DINING



HAPPY MEALS CAN BE HEALTHY MEALS: Brain scans show that small prizes keep you happy when eating less food. ⁵



DISNEY HELPS DIETS: When juice and fruit came with meals, Disney World goers consumed 11-24% more of them. ⁶



READ CAREFULLY: Per-serving calorie labels can lead to mindless overeating. ⁷



SLICE SMALLER: Smaller portions (and bigger tables) lead to smaller meals. ⁸



FOOD PANTRY SOLUTIONS: Behavioral economics in food pantries lead to healthier shopping. ⁹

III. MINDLESSLY EATING BETTER



USE SMALL PLATES: You serve 20-25% less when using small plates - but only if a researcher is not watching! ¹⁰



THE LESS FANCY THE PLATE, the Less You'll Eat. We may eat the least off paper plates. ¹¹



FORKS OVER SPOONS: Forks (versus spoons) make you overestimate calories. ¹²



AVOID NEGATIVE MESSAGES: Telling dieters "Don't eat cookies" can double how much they eat. Use 2-sided messages instead. ¹³

IV. THE FUTURE OF FOOD RESEARCH

FROM FRINGE TO FOCUS:

The Behavioral Science of Eating: Encouraging Boundary Research that has Impact ¹⁴

Boundary Research: Tools and Rules to Impact Emerging Fields ¹⁵



LEARN MORE AND WATCH THE VIDEOS
FOODPSYCHOLOGY.CORNELL.EDU/JACR



- ¹ Gal, JACR 2016
- ² Suher, Raghunathan & Hoyer, JACR 2016
- ³ Porpino, JACR 2016
- ⁴ Jami, JACR 2016
- ⁵ Reimann, MacInnis & Bechara, JACR 2016
- ⁶ Peters, Beck, Lande, Pan, Cardel, Ayoob & Hill, JACR 2016
- ⁷ Elshiewy, Jahn & Boztug, JACR 2016
- ⁸ Davis, Payne & Bui, JACR 2016
- ⁹ Wilson, JACR 2016
- ¹⁰ Holden, Zlatevska & Dubelaar, JACR 2016
- ¹¹ Williamson, Block & Keller, JACR 2016
- ¹² Szocs & Biswas, JACR 2016
- ¹³ Pham, Mandel & Morales, JACR 2016
- ¹⁴ Van Ittersum & Wansink, JACR 2016
- ¹⁵ Wansink & van Ittersum, JCB 2016

Credit: Brian Wansink

With the wide availability of convenient foods engineered for maximum tastiness— such as potato chips, chocolates, and bacon double cheeseburgers— in the modern food environment and with widespread advertising, the contemporary consumer is incessantly being bombarded with the temptation to eat. This means that, in contrast to people in traditional societies, people in contemporary societies often eat not on account of hunger but because tasty food is available and beckoning at all hours of the day.

New research published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, found that the tendency of today's consumers to eat when they are not hungry might be less advantageous for health than eating when they are hungry.

The individuals participating in the study were 45 [undergraduate students](#). The participants were first asked to rate their level of hunger and then to consume a meal rich in carbohydrates. To measure how the meal was impacting participants' health, participants' [blood glucose](#) levels were measured at regular intervals after they consumed the meal. Blood glucose levels tend to rise after a meal containing carbohydrates and it is generally healthier if blood glucose levels rise by a relatively small amount because elevated blood glucose is damaging to the body's cells.

The results of the study showed that individuals who were moderately hungry before the meal tended to have lower [blood glucose levels](#) after consuming the meal than individuals who were not particularly hungry

before consuming the meal. These findings suggest that it might be healthier for individuals to eat when they are moderately hungry than when they are not hungry.

This article is published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* entitled "The Behavioral Science of Eating."

More information: Gal, David (2016). Let Hunger Be Your Guide? Being Hungry Before a Meal is Associated with Healthier Levels of Post-Meal Blood Glucose. *The Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1.

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