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Your Dinner Date Could Make You Put on Weight

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If your dinner date chooses unhealthily from a restaurant menu, you are less likely to stick to healthy options, according to University of Birmingham research published in the British Journal of Nutrition.

A team of psychologists wanted to understand whether the behaviour of those around us undermined or encouraged either healthy or unhealthy eating. They carried out a study to examine whether selecting food in the presence of another person who is choosing mostly low or high calorie foods influenced their eating partner's food choices.

Participants selected a lunch from a buffet of high calorie foods, such as cocktail sausages and crisps, as well as low calorie options, such as vegetable sticks. They made their selections in the company of a member of the research team who chose either predominantly high calorie options or low calorie options.

After a laboratory test, the researchers discovered that the presence of another person and their choice of food can influence the food choices of an eating partner, as selection of vegetable sticks was reduced when the eating partner avoided them.

Dr Eric Robinson from the University of Birmingham's School of Psychology, who led the study, said, ‘We wanted to find out whether food choices are affected by an eating companion. Our research suggests that eating with other people can affect our intentions to eat healthily.

'We would advise people to be aware of what those around them are choosing to eat, and to make sure they stick to their intentions to eat a healthy diet.’

Dr Suzanne Higgs, Reader in Psychobiology of Appetite at the University of Birmingham, said, ‘This research underlines the social nature of eating and how this influences our behaviour’

Notes to Editors

The research is published in the British Journal of Nutrition **http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8600141 (http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8600141)**

For further information

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