

Resisting the urge - Understanding the psychology of snacking

Posted on Thursday 19th May 2011

Psychologists at the University have discovered that focussing on eating lunch and paying great attention to the food can reduce snacking in the afternoon, according to research published in the journal *Appetite*.

This study was carried out with three groups of participants who were offered the same lunch and the same biscuits later in the afternoon.

- The first group was asked to focus on lunch while eating
- The second group was given a newspaper article about food to read as they ate
- The third group was not given a secondary task to carry out.

The scientists wanted to find out whether there is a relationship between the participants recall of their lunch memory and how many biscuits they ate in the afternoon. Dr Suzanne Higgs, lead investigator from the University's School of Psychology, said, 'Our hypothesis was that if you focus on your lunch you're going to have a better memory encoding of your meal.'

The participants in the food focus group were asked to concentrate on the sensory food properties, to think about the look, smell, flavours and aftertastes of the food and the ingredients and source of the food, as well as the physical acts of chewing and swallowing. They were encouraged to eat slowly, and to pay attention to each mouthful separately during eating.

After the lunch they were asked to recall how vividly they could imagine the food. Later they were offered three different types of biscuits. Dr Suzanne Higgs continues, 'All three groups of participants were offered biscuits after the lunch, and the group that were asked to focus on their food at lunchtime and imagined the food most vividly, ate significantly fewer biscuits. This points to the conclusion that there is a link between what you are remembering about your lunch and your subsequent food intake and that altering your food memory by concentrating on the food you eat, you can affect your later snacking.'

Further information can be found at in this story's [press release \(/news/latest/2011/05/16May-Remember-your-lunch-if-you-want-to-avoid-afternoon-snack.aspx\)](#).



Snacks on campus