

Don't throw the candy out: Temptation leads to moderation

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Banishing tempting goodies may not be the best way to keep from eating them. Tempting foods can actually increase willpower, according to new research in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Although it seems counterintuitive, consumers show more self-control after they've spent some time in the presence of a treat.

Authors Kelly Geyskens, Siegfried DeWitte, Mario Pandelaere, and Luk Warlop (all Catholic University, Leuven, Belgium) conducted a series of studies where they created temptation situations for study participants. They found that the presence of actual M&Ms (as opposed to pictures or smells), improved participants' self control.

"In three experimental studies, we demonstrate that "actionability" (that is, the opportunity to consume the temptation) of the prior food temptation is the pivotal variable," explain the authors. "It appears that the self-control strategies that are marshaled to deal with the conflict in the previous tempting situation linger into the subsequent temptation situation, and hence helps consumers to control their food intake."

According to the authors, previous studies have not distinguished between actionable and non-actionable temptations (ones where the person can actually consume the item vs. ones where the person sees or smells the tempting item but cannot physically consume it). The researchers compared various situations (including putting participants in a room filled with the aroma of fresh-baked brownies) and found that they were best able to control their eating when the temptation was real.

"The results of the three studies imply that tempting consumers with real food may help them to restrict their food intake on a subsequent consumption opportunity. This suggests that having candy in large stocks at home thus might help women with their attempts at controlling their food intake, whereas seeing pictures of food in magazines or on television might lead them to eat more when given the occasion," the authors conclude.

Source: University of Chicago

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