

Impulsive eater? Remembering failures may help curb eating

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Remember when you pigged out on birthday cake? If you're an impulsive eater, that memory might help you choose a fruit salad next time around.

When it comes to tempting or fattening foods, some people are a lot more impulsive than others. And according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, impulsive people think and act differently than non-impulsive people after they remember a time when they resisted or succumbed to temptation.

Authors Anirban Mukhopadhyay (University of Michigan), Jaideep Sengupta (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), and Suresh Ramanathan (University of Chicago) assessed the impulsivity of participants in four related studies. They had participants recall instances where they gave in to temptation or resisted it. In addition to making hypothetical food choices, participants also had opportunities to eat cookies or cheeseballs—without knowing their consumption was being tracked. In the case of impulsive people, "...thinking about failure may actually beget success," write the authors.

"We propose and find that chronically non-impulsive individuals display behavior consistency over time—resisting when they recall having resisted earlier. In contrast, impulsive individuals show a switching pattern, resisting current temptations if they recall having succumbed, and vice versa," write the authors.

"So what is it that makes people succumb to temptation, time after sinful time? We suggest that the likelihood of a repeat act of indulgence depends on what people recall doing the previous time they were faced with a similar choice," the authors write. "In general, chronically impulsive people are more likely to feel this conflict between the two forces—of giving in and holding back, while those who tend to be less impulsive are also less likely to experience such a struggle."

The results of this study suggest ways to improve the health of both impulsive and non-impulsive consumers. Both groups did a better job of resisting temptation when they recalled past instances of resisting temptation along with their reasons for resisting.

Source: University of Chicago

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