

Do consumers always approach pleasure and avoid pain? New study suggests an alternative

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Whether it's doing sit-ups or eating steamed veggies instead of fries, it's often difficult to get ourselves to do something we know is beneficial. A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says we can trick ourselves into more favorable evaluations of certain products and behaviors.

"Our natural inclination is to avoid -- or try to avoid -- anything immediately aversive even though it may be beneficial for us in the long term," write authors Aparna A. Labroo (University of Chicago) and Jesper Nielsen (University of Arizona). "But to what extent might our natural avoidance of such activities and outcomes be reinforcing our dislike of things that are good for us but difficult to stomach?"

Approaching pleasure and avoiding pain are fundamental human behaviors, but the authors argue that people also subconsciously reverse this relationship: "We tend to infer that something is good based on the bodily sensation of approaching it or bad based on the sensation of avoiding it."

The authors note that psychologists often attempt to cure phobic patients by asking them to mentally simulate approaching the objects they fear. Across three studies the authors demonstrated that it is possible to use this approach to reduce aversion to certain items.

In one study, for example, the researchers offered respondents a can of curried grasshopper (not a terribly popular product among the participants). One group of people was asked to simply evaluate it. A second group was asked to mentally simulate physical avoidance of the product, and a third set was asked to simulate physical approach toward the can. "What was surprising was that merely simulating physical approach resulted in a more favorable evaluation of the product," the authors write.

"One way for us to overcome aversions is to trick our minds," the authors write. "These results suggest our aversions are derived in part from our bodily sensations, and the influence of these sensations may be more far reaching than one might have presumed."

More information: Aparna A. Labroo and Jesper Nielsen. "Half the Thrill Is in the Chase: Twisted Inferences from Embodied Cognitions." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): June 2010.

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