

Shopping study: Do free samples really make you buy products?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- As you do your holiday shopping this year, you'll probably encounter plenty of free sample stands at the big warehouse stores and grocery stores. Common sense might tell you that eating a bunch of samples would make you feel full and disinterested in buying the products. However, surprising research proves the samples not only make you want the sampled products more, but they also make you want all kinds of other rewarding items -- from spa visits to luxury trips.

"The basic idea is that when you give someone a little bit of something rewarding, they actually want more of other rewarding things," says Stephen Nowlis, AT&T Distinguished Research Professor of Marketing at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University.

"Samples whet the appetite overall. Marketers can use this information to encourage people buy much more, and shoppers should be aware, too."

In a series of experiments, Nowlis and his colleagues, professor Baba Shiv and doctoral candidate Monica Wadhwa of Stanford University, found that food samples, beverage samples and even just good-smelling samples made people consume more.

For example, in one experiment, participants were told they would be watching a documentary as part of a study for TiVo. As part of the real goal, one group was given fruit punch as it walked into the study, and the other group was not given samples. Those who had punch in advance not only drank more of the same beverage while watching the movie, but

they also ate more of the food provided to both groups attending the study.

In a similar experiment, participants were asked to rate the desirability of a wide range of items, including steak, whole wheat bread, vitamins, dishwasher liquid, notepads and a vacation in Bora Bora. The participants who had been given fruit punch samples before filling out the ratings wound up wanting more of the rewarding [products](#) overall. They also consumed more soda offered to them during the experiment.

A similar test with a pleasant-smelling odor yielded the same type of results, so the researchers believe the effects of samples are not limited only to food and drink.

"In other words, sampling any 'high incentive' item in a [grocery store](#) is likely to increase the subsequent desirability and purchase of that particular product, as well as other rewarding items," Nowlis says.

Since marketers spend more than \$1 billion a year on product sampling, this will help them broaden the effects of their efforts. It also will help consumers to be more aware of the pocketbook effects of eating those tasty samples.

Provided by Arizona State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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