

Some types of arousal can lead to unhealthy choices

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You might want to avoid food shopping right after a heavy workout or drinking after an intense day of high-powered negotiations, according to a new study in the Journal of Consumer Research.

"While happy people make better and healthier choices, this is dependent on the intensity of the positive feelings experienced. In other words, the level of arousal accompanying the [positive mood](#) state can interfere with the beneficial effect of positive mood on resistance to temptation," write authors Alexander Fedorikhin (Indiana University) and Vanessa M. Patrick (University of Houston).

In three studies, the authors found that arousal interfered with the effects of positive mood to influence resistance to tempting food. In one study, the authors asked some participants to watch a positive but calm movie clip while another set of participants watched a positive but arousing movie clip. All participants were then asked to choose between two snacks: a cup of grapes and a cup of M&Ms.

"The results showed that those participants who watched the arousing movie clip were more likely to choose M&Ms than those who watched the calm clip. Moreover, when participants who watched the calm movie clip would choose M&Ms, they were more likely to carefully regulate or monitor the amount of M&Ms they ate," the authors write.

In another study, the researchers added exercise to the mix. Participants

who watched the calm movie and performed a light exercise on a stepstool were more likely to choose M&Ms than those who were sedentary.

The authors also proposed that a shortage of mental energy leads to less-healthy choices. To test this theory, the researchers had some people in each group remember a 7-digit number and assigned others a 2-digit number. The people with the larger number were more likely to choose M&Ms.

"In order to resist temptations and make choices that are healthy and have longterm benefits, a person needs to be both in a positive frame of mind and have the available mental energy needed to make good choices," the authors conclude.

More information: Alexander Fedorikhin and Vanessa M. Patrick. "Positive Mood and Resistance to Temptation: The Interfering Influence of Elevated Arousal." Journal of Consumer Research: December 2010.

Provided by University of Chicago

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