

# Why do hopeful consumers make healthier choices than happy ones?

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Happy people are more likely to eat candy bars, whereas hopeful people choose fruit, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. That's because when people feel hope, they're thinking about the future.

"Most of us are aware that we often fall victim to [emotional eating](#), but how is it that we might choose unhealthy or healthy snacks when we're feeling good?" write authors Karen Page Winterich (Pennsylvania State University) and Kelly L. Haws (Texas A&M University).

Because previous research has explored how feeling sad leads to eating bad, the authors focused on the complicated relationship between positive emotions and food consumption. "We demonstrate the importance of the time frame on which the positive emotion focuses and find that positive emotions focusing on the future decrease unhealthy food consumption in the present," the authors write.

To understand why someone who is feeling positive would be more likely to choose a candy bar versus a piece of fruit, the authors teased out the difference between positive feelings that arise from thinking about the past or the present (pride and happiness) and hope, which is a more future-oriented emotion.

In the authors' first study, hopeful participants consumed fewer M&Ms than people who experienced happiness. In a second study, the authors found that consumers who were more focused on the past chose

unhealthy snacks, even if they felt hope. In the third study, the researchers shifted the time frame of the positive emotion (having participants feel hopeful about the past or having them experience pride in the future). "That is, if someone is anticipating feeling proud, she prefers fewer unhealthy snacks than someone experiencing pride."

Finally, the authors compared future-focused [positive emotions](#) (hopefulness, anticipated pride) to future focused negative emotions (fear, anticipated shame). They found that the combination of positivity and future focus enhanced self-control.

"So, the next time you're feeling well, don't focus too much on all the good things in the past. Instead, keep that positive glow and focus on your future, especially all the good things you imagine to come. Your waistline will thank you!" the authors conclude.

**More information:** Caglar Irmak, Beth Vallen, and Stefanie Rosen Robinson. "The Impact of Product Name on Dieters' and Non-Dieters' Food Evaluations and Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2011. Further information: [ejcr.org](http://ejcr.org)

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