

Betcha won't eat just one: Study shows people consume more candies when they're individually wrapped

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If you believe that good things always come in small packages, University of Alberta researcher Jennifer Argo's new study may change your mind -- especially this close to Halloween.

In an article forthcoming in the [Journal of Marketing](#), Argo explores how our consumption behaviours change when it comes to treats like chocolates and candies are placed in smaller packages. She says that people eat more of a product when it is placed in small packages rather than a regular-sized packages.

However, she said, those with low-appearance self-esteem -- the term researchers use to describe people who are concerned about their body, weight or [physical appearance](#) -- tend to consume more than the average population, especially when certain conditions seemed favourable.

"The low-appearance self-esteem people ate the most when they were told that the caloric information was favourable (low in calories), when the caloric information was on the front of the package and when the product was visible (clear packaging)," said Argo. "People in the high-appearance self-esteem category -- those who did not indicate concerns about weight or physical appearance -- still ate more, but there was a big jump in the consumption quantity for [those with low self-esteem]."

Giving in to the dark chocolate side

Argo says that information contained on the packages in the study samples did have an effect on the low-appearance self-esteem participants. This group tended to eat less when the product wasn't visible, the caloric information was missing or they believed there were more calories in the small packages than what they expected.

She said elements such as a visible product and content labeling information served as cues to the group's [susceptibility](#), which Argo noted gave this group a false sense of belief that the package would help them manage [consumption](#) and help them achieve potential weight-management goals. While this might be true if only a single small package is present, Argo says that, in reality, small packaged goods are often sold in multiples and her study showed that these helpful, small packages are detrimental to consumers' waistlines.

"These consumers are basically saying, 'this package is going to protect me; it's going to help me achieve my goal,' and so they relinquish control to the package," she said. "They throw up their hands and say, 'I don't have to worry because the package is taking care of everything for me.' As soon as they've given up initial control, they have no control to deal with that next package that's presented to them."

Self-defense against small packages

Argo says that buying the regular-sized packages of these types of snacks and exercising portion control will not only reduce [calories](#), but also save money as well, although she says that some people may still opt to buy the small packages out of convenience. For this group, she counsels that they retake control and limit the number of packages they take out at any one time. And especially with the seductive call of leftover [Halloween](#) candies around the corner, Argo says the old adage of "watch what you eat" may not be a bad idea.

"Relinquishing control to small packages is "a very cognitive process; people are purposefully doing this," she said. "(In the study) we found that if we interrupt the participants, if we distracted them with a task, they don't fall prey (to overeating).

"When it's a small package, distractions are actually beneficial in some respects."

Provided by University of Alberta

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