

# Resisting temptation: Why reading your horoscope on diet days might be a bad idea

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Most major newspapers publish daily horoscopes, and for good reason—even when we deny being superstitious, human nature drives us to believe in our own fate. According to a new study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers who believe their fate can change are more likely to exhibit impulsive or indulgent behavior after reading a negative horoscope.

"Given the prevalence of horoscopes in Western cultures, we looked at the influence one's horoscope might have on the decisions that person makes," write authors Hyeongmin (Christian) Kim (Johns Hopkins University), Katina Kulow, and Thomas Kramer (both University of South Carolina).

In one study, participants were presented with an unfavorable horoscope and then asked to choose between either an indulgence (going to a party) or a virtuous alternate (cleaning their home). The results showed that for people who believe they could change their [fate](#), an unfavorable horoscope increased the likelihood of that person going to the party.

Interestingly, the researchers observed that the act of counter-arguing the unfavorable horoscope required mental resources and left the fate-changers unable to resist temptation. Participants who believed in a fixed fate did not exert any mental energy on the subject, and were consequently able to stay focused on the day ahead.

"Conventional wisdom might suggest that for people who believe they

can change their fate, an unfavorable horoscope should result in an attempt to improve their fate," the authors conclude. "Our results showed that reading an unfavorable horoscope actually has the opposite effect on a person."

The authors' findings may be of particular interest to brands selling indulgent products like chocolates, ice cream, or cake. Advertising in close proximity to the horoscope section and using slogans like "Life is what you make of it!" may be a good strategy for reaching consumers who believe their fate can be altered.

**More information:** Hyeongmin (Christian) Kim, Katina Kulow, and Thomas Kramer. "The Interactive Effect of Beliefs in Malleable Fate and Fateful Predictions on Choice." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2014.

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