

How do you really feel about the cake? Emotional awareness promotes healthier eating

November 11 2014

As obesity rates rise, health professionals and policy makers scramble to help consumers resist unhealthy eating choices, often focusing on better labeling and improved nutritional knowledge. According to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, however, training people to pay attention to their emotions is a far more powerful strategy.

"Consumers are often mindless," write authors Blair Kidwell (Ohio State University), Jonathan Hasford (Florida International University) and David M. Hardesty (University of Kentucky). "We not only demonstrate that emotional ability is trainable and that food choices can be enhanced, but also that emotional ability training improves [food choices](#) beyond a nutrition knowledge training program."

Study participants were given general training in recognizing [basic emotions](#) in themselves and in others, after which they were exposed to a variety of food products and packaging and asked to notice what emotions they, and others, were experiencing. After the training, both the trained participants and people who had received no training were given the opportunity to choose a snack of either a healthy item or a chocolate bar. Those who had received the training were more likely to choose the healthy item.

Three months later participants in both groups were weighed: Those who had received training in recognizing their emotions had, on average, lost

weight whereas those who had received no training had actually put on weight.

The authors conclude by urging consumer educational programs to put less focus on reading nutritional labels and to instead encourage exercises that enhance emotional awareness.

"With a better understanding of how they feel and how to use emotions to make better decisions, people will not only eat better, they will also likely be happier and healthier because they relate better to others and are more concerned with their overall well-being."

More information: Blair Kidwell, Jonathan Hasford, and David M. Hardesty. "Emotional Ability Training and Mindful Eating." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: How do you really feel about the cake? Emotional awareness promotes healthier eating (2014, November 11) retrieved 8 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-cake-emotional-awareness-healthier.html>

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