

# Trying to lose weight? How to avoid setting yourself up for failure

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If you're on a diet, just skipping dessert can seem like a huge accomplishment, leading you to think you're well on your way to losing weight. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers tend to overestimate progress and underestimate setbacks when pursuing goals such as dieting or saving money.

"Our studies provide strong evidence of a progress bias when consumers pursue [goals](#). Consumers tend to think that 'good' behaviors impact goal pursuit more than equivalent 'bad' behaviors. This can make consumers think that they are doing fine when they really aren't," write authors Margaret C. Campbell (University of Colorado) and Caleb Warren (Texas A&M University).

Across seven studies, the authors found evidence for the progress bias (the belief that the positive has more impact than the negative) when consumers pursued goals such as [saving money](#), losing weight, or winning a game.

Consumers tend to believe they will succeed in achieving their goals and give more weight to behaviors consistent with their beliefs. For example, if you are on a diet, you are likely to think that not eating a donut makes a bigger difference than eating a donut. Or you might think that saving \$100 will get you closer to your goal of saving \$100,000 for retirement than spending \$100 will take you away from reaching your goal of saving \$100,000.

"People feel that they can stop working toward a goal before they really should. This is consistent with findings that exercise programs often do not lead to weight loss because people tend to think they can eat more if they exercise more. We think the progress bias helps explain why [consumers](#) often have a hard time achieving difficult long-term goals such as managing their weight or saving for retirement," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Margaret C. Campbell and Caleb Warren. "The Progress Bias in Goal Pursuit: When One Step Forward Seems Larger than One Step Back." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2015.

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