

A recipe for friendship: Similar food

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How do you build rapport with a new employer or someone on a first date? It turns out that there may be a simple strategy that's often overlooked: eat the same food as your companion.

Researchers from the University of Chicago launched a series of experiments to determine whether similar [food](#) consumption facilitates a sense of closeness and [trust](#) between adults, and their results were recently published online in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

In their first study, each participant was partnered with a stranger when playing an investment game designed to measure trust. The participants received money that they could give to the stranger, who would invest the money—with a guarantee that the investment would double in value. The strangers, or "[fund managers](#)," could decide how much—if any—of the invested money to give back to their partners. Some pairs were assigned to eat the same candy before the exercise, while others ate different candy. The researchers discovered that the participants gave more money to the strangers when they had eaten the same type of candy.

The researchers further tested the influence of food in a second study in which pairs were assigned to opposing sides of a labor negotiation. Some pairs ate similar foods during the negotiations while others ate different foods. The pairs that had eaten similar foods reached an agreement almost twice as quickly as the groups that ate dissimilar foods.

"People tend to think that they use logic to make decisions, and they are

largely unaware that [food preferences](#) can influence their thinking," says Ayelet Fishbach, a professor in the business school at the University of Chicago. "On a very basic level, food can be used strategically to help people work together and build trust."

At large group meetings, for example, organizers could limit the number of [food options](#) in order to encourage similar food consumption, which could lead to increased trust and collaboration, says Kaitlin Woolley, one of the researchers. When ordering food during lunch with a colleague or dinner on a blind date, selecting a similar type of food could build rapport, she says.

The researchers also discovered that these findings applied to marketing products. Participants trusted information from advertisers when consumers ate the same type of food as advertisers giving a testimonial about the product.

Although similar food preferences promoted trust and cooperation, the [researchers](#) were eager to discover whether other types of similarities had a same effect. They tested whether outside observers thought individuals wearing shirts of the same color trusted each other more than individuals wearing different colored shirts. The results revealed that similarity in shirt color did not have the same influence as food on perceived trust.

"I think food is powerful because it is something that we put into our bodies and we need to trust it in order to do that," Fishbach says. "I hope our research will be used to connect people and facilitate conflict resolution. Our next goal is studying whether sharing food has an impact on trust and cooperation."

More information: This study will appear in the January, 2017 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

Provided by Society for Consumer Psychology

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