

Apples for me, Doritos for you: Consumers buy healthier foods for themselves

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Feel like Mom is pushing dessert? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers choose foods that are less healthy when they are purchasing for others.

In a series of studies on [food choice](#), author Juliano Laran (University of Miami) discovered that consumers exert more self-control when they make choices for themselves.

In one study, participants were asked to make a sequence of four choices from 16 items that were healthy (items like raisins, celery sticks, and cheerios) or indulgent (items like chocolate bars, cookies, Doritos, ice cream, and doughnuts). Half of the participants were asked to choose four items for themselves, while the others were asked to choose four items for a friend.

"When making choices for themselves, participants chose a balance of healthy and indulgent food items," Laran writes. "When making choices for others, however, participants chose mostly indulgent food items."

The author conducted another study of real consumers exiting a supermarket, which confirmed the earlier results, and showed that consumers bought equally indulgent items when purchasing for their families, friends, or roommates. A final study showed that consumer choices became more balanced after they were made aware of a healthy goal when making choices for others.

The author suggests that education could help consumers make more balanced choices when they are shopping for others. He also suggests that this phenomenon may be affecting [public health](#).

"One of the reasons the population gets more and more obese is that a lot of the food we consume is chosen by other people, like friends throwing a party or parents buying for their children," Laran writes. "Taking responsibility for their own choices instead of letting others choose could help consumers fight against [obesity](#) and lead a healthier lifestyle."

More information: Juliano Laran. "Goal Management in Sequential Choices: Consumer Choices for Others Are More Indulgent than Personal Choices." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2010. (Published online March 3, 2010).

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