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Contact: Mary-Ann Twist / 608-255-5582 / JCR@bus.wisc.edu

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What's the Upside of Feeling Too Sad for Chocolate?

The instant gratification and the pleasure derived from consuming excessive chocolate and deep-fried foods can lead way to a double-edged sword of negative consequences ranging from weight gain to feelings of low self-esteem. According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), combating this type of self-destructive behavior may be achieved simply by making a person feel sad.

“We found that when people who are sad are exposed to pictures of indulgent food or indulgent words, their sadness highlights the negative consequences of indulging and encourages them to indulge less,” write authors Anthony Salerno, Juliano Laran (both University of Miami), and Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida).

In a series of five experiments, the authors studied the behavior of participants who were exposed to either indulgent or neutral words or images and then made to feel sad. In one study, participants were asked to either look at a series of print ads that featured pleasurable foods like pizza and chocolate cake or to look at neutral print ads featuring products like washing machines and electric cars. Immediately after viewing the print ads, the participants were asked to complete a writing task that made them feel sad. At the end of the study, the participants were given the opportunity to eat indulgent foods like M&M's or chocolate chip cookies.

Study results showed that when people were first exposed to pleasurable information and then made to feel sad, they decreased their consumption of indulgent foods. The authors also found that these participants were more likely to indicate how consuming indulgent foods could lead to health problems. In contrast, when people were exposed to neutral information and made to feel sad, they increased their consumption of indulgent foods.

“Our research has important implications for consumers, particularly as obesity remains a major health concern in the United States. For brands looking to understand what triggers help and hinder people in their ability to eat healthy foods, we provide insight into when sadness might aid consumers in becoming less prone to indulging in unhealthy foods on a daily basis,” the authors conclude.

Anthony Salerno, Juliano Laran, and Chris Janiszewski. “Hedonic Eating Goals and Emotion: When Sadness Decreases the Desire to Indulge.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2014. For more information, contact Anthony Salerno (a.salerno@umiami.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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