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What Do Saving Money and Losing Weight Have in Common?

Consumers will pay more when they are given *different* options to pursue short-term goals, but will pay more for *similar* options when pursuing long-term goals, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“Many of the benefits of pursuing self-control goals such as being healthy are experienced in the future. Thus, a key component of our success in meeting our goals is the ability to remain motivated. One way for consumers to manage motivation is to strategically choose the options available to them in pursuing their goals,” write authors Jordan Etkin and Rebecca K. Ratner (both University of Maryland).

Consumers often use multiple products to help them achieve their goals. For example, a health-conscious consumer might go shopping for healthy snacks to consume over the next few days. She might purchase many packages of the same healthy snack or a variety of healthy snacks. Would she be more motivated to be healthy this week if she plans to consume many different snacks instead of the same snack repeatedly? How about over the next year?

In one study, consumers were more motivated to save money in the present when they thought about different approaches to saving, but more motivated to save money over the next year when thinking of similar approaches to saving. In another study, consumers participated in an auction for a personal training session. When told the session would take place in a week, consumers were willing to pay more when the trainer emphasized different exercises. However, when the session would take place in a month, consumers were willing to pay more when the trainer emphasized similar exercises.

“Companies wanting to encourage consumers to focus on being healthy in the present should highlight differences among product assortments while highlighting similarities when encouraging healthy behavior in the future. Consumers seeking to save money could focus on differences among the ways they are currently saving to keep them motivated in the present, or on similarities between the ways they are saving to keep them motivated as they plan for the future,” the authors conclude.

Jordan Etkin and Rebecca K. Ratner. “Goal Pursuit, Now and Later: Temporal Compatibility of Different versus Similar Means.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2013. For more information, contact Jordan Etkin (jetkin@rhsmith.umd.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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