

Healthy Snacking: Good Intentions, Bad Choices

Editorial Staff

In a study published in the September/October 2008 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*,¹ researchers recruited 585 office workers from their worksite cafeterias to determine if people actually follow through on their snack-choice intentions. Participants were asked about their intentions in choosing among four snacks: an apple, a banana, a candy bar and a molasses waffle (unhealthy snacks) and then asked to choose one of the four snacks one week later.

About half of the participants (49 percent) indicated they would choose the apple or the banana (considered the healthy snacks). However, when presented with the actual snacks one week later, 27 percent switched to the candy bar or waffle. People who initially said they would choose the unhealthy snack generally kept to their word: More than 90 percent of those who intended to pick the candy bar or waffle actually did so. Only eight percent switched from an unhealthy choice to a healthy one. Researchers made clear to all participants that they could choose any one of the four snack choices, regardless of their stated intention the week prior.

Participants who selected the unhealthy snack choice intention were more likely to be male, eat less healthy snacks, have a lower health attitude and consider the unhealthy snacks as more pleasant than the healthful snacks. However, the researchers noted that social desirability may have influenced choices, at least to some extent: Some participants may have felt obligated to choose the same snack as the week before, particularly if they had originally chosen one of the healthy options.

The researchers commented, "A substantial gap between healthy snack-choice intentions and actual behavior was demonstrated. Despite that gap, the results suggest that individuals who plan to make a healthful choice are more likely to do so than those who plan to make unhealthful choices. Because more than 50 percent of the population seems to have no intention at all of making a healthful choice, identifying tools by which this group can be motivated to choose a healthful snack is strongly needed."

References

1. Weijzen PLG, de Graaf C, Dijksterhuis GB. [Discrepancy between snack choice intentions and behavior](#). *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, September/October 2008;40(5).

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