

Chew on this: How does food texture impact its perceived calorie content?

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Food is an intimately personal thing; we savor some tastes and despise others. But how does the way we chew and eat our food impact our overall consumption? According to a new study in the Journal of Consumer Research, people perceive foods that are either hard or have a rough texture to have fewer calories.

"We studied the link between how a food feels in your mouth and the amount we eat, the types of food we choose, and how many calories we think we are consuming," write authors Dipayan Biswas, Courtney Szocs (both University of South Florida), Aradhna Krishna (University of Michigan), and Donald R. Lehmann (Columbia University).

In five laboratory studies, the researchers asked participants to sample foods that were hard, soft, rough, or smooth and then measured calorie estimations for the food. In one study, participants were asked to watch and evaluate a series of television ads.

While watching the ads, cups filled with bite-sized brownie bits were provided to the participants as tokens of appreciation for their time. Half of the participants were not asked anything about the brownies and the other half were asked a question about the calorie content of the brownies. Within each of these two groups, half of the participants received brownie bits that were soft and the other half received brownie bits that were hard.

When the participants were not made to focus on the calorie content, they consumed a higher volume of brownies when they were soft (vs. hard). In contrast, when made to focus on the calorie content, the participants consumed a higher volume of brownies when they were hard (vs. soft).

Brands interested in promoting the health benefits of their products can emphasize texture, as well as drawing attention to low-calorie foods. "Understanding how the texture of food can influence calorie perceptions, food choice, and consumption amount can help nudge consumers towards making healthier choices," the authors conclude.

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Journal Reference:

1. Dipayan Biswas, Courtney Szocs, Aradhna Krishna, and Donald R. Lehmann. **Something to Chew On: The Effects of Oral Haptics on Mastication, Orosensory Perception, and Calorie Estimation.** *Journal of Consumer Research*, August 2014

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