

HOW SENSORY PLEASURE INCITES CHILDREN TO GO FOR SMALLER PORTIONS?

Several studies have shown that the pleasure of eating encourages moderation while preserving satisfaction. Yann Cornil, Senior Lecturer at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Pierre Chandon, Professor at INSEAD¹ in Fontainebleau, have therefore tried to find an answer to the question: "How can we encourage consumers to choose, but also prefer, small food portions?" The scientists found that imagining the texture, flavour and aroma of food before choosing or tasting a dish helps achieve this objective. This process is called "the sensorial imagery of food pleasure".

These two researchers joined forces with CSGA researchers to run a study in the framework of the French National Research Agency PUNCH project. This project aims at "promoting and understanding healthy food choices in children". During two mid-afternoon snacks, 171 children aged between 8 and 11 were split into two groups. The first was an experimental group who played a sensory imagery game involving food (children were asked to imagine the texture, flavour and aroma of fun foods like chocolate wafers or Smarties) and the second was a control group who were asked to play a sensory imagery game unrelated to food (children were asked to imagine how they felt building a sand castle on the beach or walking in the woods). The children then had to choose one portion of chocolate brownies from three different sized pieces (first snack) and a pot of apple sauce among three different sized pots (second snack) before sitting at the table to taste their chosen portions.

In the "sensory imagery of food pleasure" group, the children chose portions of brownie which were 7% smaller on average than those in the control group. No effect was observed on the amount of apple sauce chosen. These results underline the fact that focusing on sensory pleasure can actually encourage children to choose smaller portions... even of very appetizing foods!

These initial observations remain to be confirmed with other foods but open up some very interesting perspectives for encouraging the young to eat healthy and sustainable food.

Contact

Christine Lange, christine.lange@inrae.fr

To know more

Lange C, Schwartz C, Hachéfa C, Cornil Y, Nicklaus S, Chandon P (2020). Portion size choice in children: effect of sensory imagery for snacks varying in energy density. *Appetite*, 150.

Key-words

Food choice; children; sensory imagery; pleasure; portion size; healthy diet



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¹ European Institute of Business Administration