

The Effect of Food Toppings on Calorie Estimation and Consumption Volume

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Abstract

In this research we investigate how different types of food toppings (healthy or unhealthy) influence consumers' calorie estimation of the augmented food (base food plus topping). The results of three experiments show that consumers underestimate the calorie content of an augmented food (base plus topping) with unhealthy base food (e.g., cake), especially when the topping is healthy (e.g., fruits). However, this effect of underestimation is much smaller or non-existent for an augmented food with healthy base food (e.g., salad), regardless of whether topping is healthy (e.g., fruits) or unhealthy (e.g., dressing). We attribute this asymmetric effect of calorie estimation to the different motivations (motivated to justify versus motivated to be accurate respectively) that consumers have when estimating calories in these two conditions.

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