Food&Brand Lab

Invent • Redesign • Empower

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Is an arm's length away far enough to stop you from eating all that candy?

Background

Do you ever find yourself snacking on the candy sitting on your desk and before you know it is are all gone?

Research shows that factors such as food's visibility or convenience can influence how much food you eat. If chocolates are placed with in arms reach, for example on top of the desk, approximately 1.5 times more candies are consumed than with the candies in the desk. However, if the candy is farther than an arm's reach away, 50% less candy is consumed.

Also, candy placement influences how much people believe they have eaten. When candy is located on the desk or within arms reach, people overestimate their consumption of the candy by 13%. When the candy is placed across the room, people underestimate their consumption by 63%.

An encouraging implication is that if visibility and convenience increase the consumption of candy, the same effect may also work for healthier foods such as fruits or vegetables. Knowing the impact of these factors can help people better monitor and manage consumption.

Key Teaching Point

- The closer the food the more you eat
- The farther you have to walk the less you eat and the less you think you ate.

Student Demonstration

The demonstration is a thought experiment. This will work best in a study hall setting or another free-time period.

Break the students into two groups (half of the class in each group) and say . . .

Group one: *Imagine that each of you has a bowl of 20 Starburst candies sitting on your desk. Through out the class today, I want you to think about how many candies you would eat from your bowl of candy.*

Group two: Imagine that sitting on the desk in front of the classroom there is a bowl of Starbursts. You can have as many Starbursts as you want throughout the class. You just have to get up and help yourself. Throughout class, I want you to think about how many candies you would eat.

Towards the end of the class, ask the students to tell you how many Starbursts they would have eaten. Keep a tally on the chalkboard. The students with the candy on their desks should say they would have consumed more than those who had to get up and get the candy. It is also important to ask the students:

W*hich group would remember better how many Starbursts they ate - group one or group two?*

Those students who had to get up and get the candy are more likely to forget and underestimate how many Starbursts they ate. While those students with the Starbursts on their desks will be more accurate. Knowing this, ask the students to brainstorm how they could use this to eat healthier.

Painter, James E., Brian Wansink, & Julie B. Hieggelke (2002), "How Visibility and Convenience Influence Candy Consumption," Appetite, 38:3 (June), 237-238.