

Food as Fuel: Performance goals increase consumption of high-calorie foods at the expense of good nutrition

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Abstract

At work, at school, at the gym or even at home, consumers often face challenging situations in which they are motivated to perform their best. This research demonstrates that activating performance goals in cognitive or physical domains leads to an increased consumption of high-calorie foods at the expense of good nutrition. We demonstrate that this effect derives from beliefs that the function of food is to provide energy for the body (“food as fuel”) coupled with poor nutrition literacy, leading lay consumers to overgeneralize the role of calories for performance. We further show that performance goals no longer increase calorie intake when emphasizing the hedonic function of food (“food for pleasure”). Hence, while consumer research interprets the overconsumption of high-calorie foods as a consequence of hedonic goals and self-regulation failures, our research suggests that this overconsumption may also be explained by a maladaptive motivation to manage energy intake.

Keywords: *nutrition; beliefs; goals*

Track: Consumer Behaviour