

I know tastes: the role of early taste preferences on the development of the “Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition”

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Abstract

Children often consume insufficient amounts of vegetables, raising concerns about their diet quality. Prior work suggests that the Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition (UTI) contributes to these patterns, making it important to understand how this intuition emerges. This research examines how early taste preferences relate to the development of UTI and later eating behaviours. Across two studies, we tested whether early sweet and bitter preferences predict UTI via a mechanism involving avoidance of unfamiliar foods. Consistently across both studies, perceived bitter taste preferences, but not actual bitter taste preferences, emerged as a negative predictor of UTI. Mediation analyses showed that lower bitter preferences were associated with heightened food neophobia, which in turn predicted stronger UTI beliefs. This research elucidates how children’s food beliefs develop and are socialised, and offers valuable insights for designing interventions that foster healthier eating habits in children.

Track: Consumer Behaviour