Consumer Trends: Does Food Addiction Exist?

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Women with weight problems were more impulsive than average in a food-related psychology test, a new research paper has shown. This suggested that they are more instinctively stimulated by images of food as well as lacking contemplative will power. Further, some women reported food craving even if they had eaten recently, a symptom of possible food addiction.

"All addictions are similar in that the sufferer craves to excess the feel-good buzz they receive from chemical neurotransmitters produced when they eat, gamble, smoke, have sex or take drugs," commented Claus Voegele, Professor of Clinical and Health Psychology at the University of Luxembourg.

In this original test, images of fatty or sweet food (a burger, cake, pizza etc.) and non-food items (a sock, a mug, a shoe etc.) were flashed at random on a computer screen. The women were instructed to click as fast as possible on either the food or non-food pictures. The women with weight problems performed less well than the average.

Tests were run either three hours after eating or just after meals. The researchers found that several women with weight problems said the test had provoked food craving, regardless of how recently they had eaten. "This suggests that some people may have an instinctive, psychological predisposition to binge eating," Prof. Voegele said.

He pointed to other research which indicates both nature and nurture are at the root of this condition. "People may over-eat to comfort themselves, because they are bored or just out of habit," he said. At the other end of the spectrum, those with excessive control may suffer disorders such as anorexia nervosa.

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