Healthy Satiation: the Role of Satiation in Having Effective Self Control

Joseph Redden, University of Minnesota, USA
Kelly Haws, Texas A&M University, USA

Although satiation has often been viewed as a hindrance to the enjoyment of life’s experiences, we propose the satiation positively impacts self-control. Differential rates of satiation based on product type and individual differences in self-control underscore the conditions under which satiation enhances consumer decision making.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/16304/volumes/v38/NA-38

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Healthy Satiation: The Role of Satiation in Having Effective Self Control
Joseph Redden, University of Minnesota, USA
Kelly Haws, Texas A&M University, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The present research merges perspectives from past research on satiation and self-control. We study how satiation may serve to enhance self-control in the domain of food consumption. Past research has shown that people tend to satiate on a variety of products and experiences. Interestingly, satiation is most typically viewed negatively, as something that needs to be overcome through a variety of mechanisms such as variety seeking (Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999), use of more detailed levels of categorization (Redden 2008), among other things. In the present research, we examine the potential positive effects of satiation. Specifically, we examine circumstances under which various levels of satiation beneficially impact self-control related behaviors.

We define satiation as the decline in pleasure with repeated consumption (Coombs and Avrunin 1977; Redden 2008). Research regarding the “hedonic treadmill” (Brickman and Campbell 1971) suggests that we continually seek to have new experiences in order to simply keep our current level of happiness from declining. Such perspectives suggest that reducing satiation will provide benefits to the consumer. However, hedonic treadmill aside, could it be that the human tendency to satiate actually serves a very useful purpose in goal-driven behavior?

Consider for example, the abundance of cookies, candies, and other tempting desserts readily available during the holiday season. Might some people simply get their fill of such indulgences more quickly than others, and therefore have fewer holiday pounds to shed in the aftermath? Presumably, they enjoy such indulgences as much as the next guy, but perhaps they more quickly feel satisfied with the experience? In the present research, we examine how self-control and decreases in the enjoyment of a consumption opportunity may interact to contribute to “healthy” satiation. After establishing the basic effect, we examine differences in product type and a potential process explanation for our results in a series of three studies.

In study 1, we establish a link between inherent self-control and predicted satiation on an ambiguous stimulus. The 73 adult participants were provided with a description of pretzels, and were then asked to indicate how much they would enjoy the first, fifth, and tenth handful of these pretzels. Separately, their inherent self-control was assessed using the 13-item version of the general self-control scale (Tangney et al. 2004). Results indicated that the decreases in enjoyment from the first bite to both the fifth and tenth bites were more dramatic for consumers higher in self-control. In other words, they predicted that they would satiate more quickly on the pretzels. We note that initial levels of enjoyment did not differ based on self-control.

In study 2, we test the role that product type might play in influencing rates of satiation. We theorize that the consumption of virtuous products should not be perceived to negatively influence long-term goals because such products do not elicit the same level of temptation for immediate gratification or threat to achievement of long-term outcomes (Wertenbroch 1998). As such, differences in rates of satiation based on one’s level of self-control will be enhanced for products viewed as more vice in nature. To test this prediction, 175 adult consumers were asked to consider either a set of three relatively healthy desserts or three relatively unhealthy desserts. Our results indicate that high self-control consumers tend to enjoy healthier desserts more initially, but satiate at the same rate as low self-control consumers with repeated consumption. In contrast, high self-control people find unhealthy desserts to be just as enjoyable the first time they have it, but they get satiated much faster. This overall interaction illustrates that the type of product matters, and that high self-control individuals appear to satiate more quickly when it is healthy to do so, but not when it is less beneficial to do so.

Finally, in study 3 we examine actual consumption as well as the underlying process for our effects. Specifically, we propose that the reduction in liking or desire that high self-control individuals exhibit for ambiguous or unhealthy alternatives can be explained by the enhanced monitoring or attention that they pay to their consumption experiences. This leads to an enhanced recognition that their enjoyment of the stimulus has decreased. We used a natural between subjects manipulation of healthiness (based on pretesting) and presented 215 students with either a set of three candy bars or a set of three granola bars. Three options were given in order to ensure participants would have a reasonable level of liking for the selected product (thereby providing “room” for decreased enjoyment). Our primary measures of satiation in this study included anticipated recovery time (i.e., how soon they would want the snack again) and desire to have the snack again the next day. In addition, after a filler task, we presented them with another serving of their chosen snack and we measured their actual consumption. Self-control was once again assessed separately from the main study. As in study 2, a significant interaction emerged. For healthy snacks, the recovery time had a negative relationship with self-control, indicating that high self-control individuals expected to recover from satiation on healthy snacks faster than those low in self-control. For unhealthy snacks, the data showed the opposite pattern as high self-control individuals tended to expect longer recovery times. Similar patterns were found for the desire to eat tomorrow and actual consumption of a second serving of the snack. Additional analysis demonstrates that the attention paid to consumption mediates the relationship between the self-control X snack type interaction and all three of our dependent measures.

In conclusion, we suggest that differences in satiation rates may help explain why some people find it easier to exhibit self-control than others. In particular, people high in self-control will get satiated faster with unhealthy foods and less so with relatively healthy foods. We suggest that this is explain in part by the attention that high in self-control pay to their consumption quantity when consuming an unhealthy food that helps them recognize their reduction in desire.

REFERENCES


