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Want to Eat Healthier? Don't Talk—Just Click

We have many ways to choose what we eat—from pressing a button on a vending machine to clicking on a computer or speaking directly to a restaurant server. How does the way we choose affect our choices? According to a recent study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), we're more likely to order indulgent foods when speaking—versus using our hands—to place an order.



“Merely changing the way consumers express their decision influences what they choose. Those who choose verbally, by speaking into a microphone or directly to a person, select more indulgent options (higher-calorie snacks) than those who choose manually, by pressing buttons or writing,” say authors Anne-Kathrin Klesse (Tilburg University), Jonathan Levav (Stanford University), and Caroline Goukens (Maastricht University).

Why does the way we choose influence our decisions? “The way people express decisions activates different regions of the brain and may influence the extent to which emotions rather than cognitions determine a decision. We speculate that speaking may elicit greater impulsiveness and less reflection than manual expression,” say the authors.

In a series of studies, researchers compared spoken versus manual food selection and subsequent choices. Restaurant diners, for example, were more likely to opt for the indulgent dessert (chocolate) instead of the healthier alternative (fruit) if they ordered via microphone versus pushing a button next to their options.

“Our findings could have important implications for those who do business in person, say through a retail store, or remotely via website. Many establishments already offer new ways of making choices. For instance, some restaurants now give diners electronic tablets in place of menus, which may encourage them to opt for different (healthier) dishes simply because they make decisions manually rather than verbally,” conclude the authors.

Anne-Kathrin Klesse, Jonathan Levav, and Caroline Goukens. “[The Effect of Preference Expression Modality on Self-Control.](#)” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2015.



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