



**YOU MAY BE USING FOOD TO CHANGE YOUR MOOD**

When you're feeling blue, is the cookie jar your best friend? What about when you're happy? We tend to think of emotional eating as only for the depressed, but new research indicates that even people who say they are happy are likely to throw back a couple of chocolate bars if they think the sweets will help them stay upbeat.

A study published recently in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* revealed that about twice as many university students ate cookies, pretzels and cheese when they thought the food would affect their mood. Some thought the snack would make them feel happier, but others thought it would simply keep them feeling good.

"Before this study, most people thought that if you're in a bad mood, you just give up on your diet and give in to food," says Dianne Tice, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Case Western Reserve University and one of the co-authors of the study. "We found that it doesn't matter what mood you're in, but how you attempt to regulate it," she says. Thus, even happy people have to avoid using food to determine emotions.

Tice's study also found that people were twice as likely to procrastinate if they thought it would change their mood. She and her colleagues are planning to look at how people use emotions to help them maintain control instead of losing it.

—Kelly McCarthy

**(Nutrition) Insights**

**DIET**  
**STARVING SELF-ESTEEM**

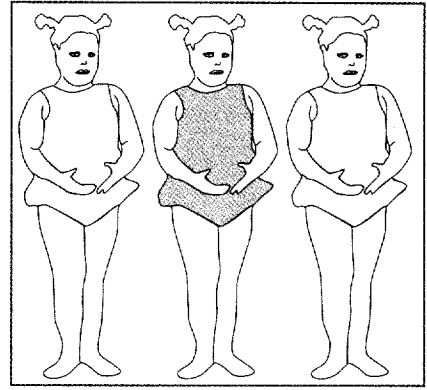
**PARENTAL WORRIES WEIGH HEAVILY ON GIRLS**

Weight problems can start at a young age—and so can the self-esteem issues that go hand in hand with being heavy. As early as the age of five, girls are affected by how others perceive them.

Researchers at Pennsylvania State University talked to 197 five-year-old girls and their families to determine how a girl's weight and her parents' concern about it affect her self-esteem. The girls who weighed more were more likely to have a negative self-image, and the lowest levels of self-esteem showed up in overweight girls whose parents restricted their daughter's eating. Not only did the girls believe that they had limited physical ability, they also had lower opinions of their cognitive skills.

"It was astonishing to us," says Leann Birch, Ph.D., a professor at Penn State and one of the authors of the study, published in the journal *Pediatrics*. "From very early on, appearance is important and it's a part of self-evaluation."

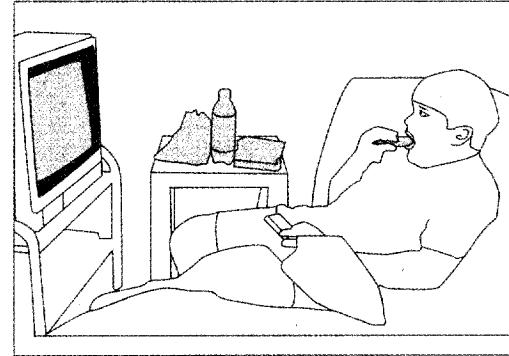
There's much information in the media about



childhood obesity, Birch explains. "Parents know that it is unhealthy, but just being concerned and restricting the child's intake appear to have negative effects." Birch and lead researcher Kirsten Davison, a Ph.D. candidate at Penn State, suggest parents find ways for their daughters to be more active and offer foods they should eat, rather than stress the ones they shouldn't. —Sarah Smith

**INFLUENCES**  
**Distracted Dining**

WHEN THE DINNER TABLE IS A TV TRAY, EATING HABITS GO AWRY



Fruits and "Friends" don't mix. Families who watch TV during dinnertime may develop poor eating habits, putting kids at risk for obesity and its related

physical and mental problems, new research suggests.

A Tufts University study, recently released by the American Academy of Pe-

diatrics on its Web site, found that when families didn't separate eating from other activities, particularly watching TV, kids consumed fewer fruits and vegetables and more junk food and soda.

"It's really important that parents, no matter who they are, where they are or how stressed out they are, realize that eating is one of the most fundamental health-related behaviors we have," says the study's

lead author, Katharine Coon, M.S., a research associate at Tufts.

Cutting out the distractions and structuring every mealtime—away from the TV—is the best way to ensure that healthier foods make it to the table, she continues. "It doesn't have to be a fancy table and a three-course meal. Once parents separate and structure eating times, incorporating healthy foods becomes much simpler." —Sarah Smith