

# Menthol in chewing gum may increase craving for junk food



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Chewing gum may lead people to eat chips, cookies and candy instead of fruits and veggies because menthol — the chemical which gives gum its minty-fresh flavour — makes fruits and veggies taste bitter, according to a new study.

Some researchers have proposed that chewing gum could help people eat less and lead to weight loss, but the new study, published in the journal *Eating Behaviours*, suggests that the chemical menthol in some types of gum makes fruits and vegetables taste funny.

The chemical change is the same reason why “when you brush your teeth and then drink orange juice, it tastes bad,” said study co-author Christine Swoboda, a doctoral candidate in nutrition at Ohio State University.

Only a few studies have looked at whether chewing gum aids weight loss, and these have found conflicting results, Swoboda told *Livesci-*

*ence*. Swoboda and colleague Jennifer Temple of the University at Buffalo asked 44 volunteers to play a slotmachine-style game in exchange for food. Some of the participants played for mandarin oranges or grapes, while others played for potato chips or M&Ms.

Prior to playing the game, half of the participants chewed either Juicy Fruit gum or Wrigley’s Spearmint gum.

Those who chewed the minty gum were significantly less likely to play as long for the fruit, suggesting they were less motivated to get them when chewing gum. The fruity gum showed a smaller effect that wasn’t statistically significant.

In a second experiment, the researchers asked participants to keep a food journal recording what they ate. Some of the time, the participants were asked to chew a mint green-tea gum before every meal and snack for a week, while other times, they simply had to record their food intake.

When chewing gum, participants ate fewer meals. But that didn’t translate into fewer calories: Instead, people were actually getting fewer nutrients in their diet and about the same amount of calories.

It could be that the menthol in mint, which interacts with nutrients in fruits and veggies to create a bitter flavour, was turning people off to the healthy foods, Swoboda said.