

# Unhealthy eating can make a bad mood worse

March 15 2013

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(Medical Xpress)—Taking part in unhealthy eating behaviors may cause women who are concerned about their diet and self-image to experience a worsening of their moods, according to Penn State researchers.

In a study, college-age women who were concerned about their eating behaviors reported that moods worsened after bouts of [disordered eating](#), said Kristin Heron, research associate at the Survey Research Center.

"There was little in the way of [mood changes](#) right before the unhealthy eating behaviors," said Heron. "However, [negative mood](#) was significantly higher after these behaviors."

According to Heron, who worked with Joshua Smyth, professor of [biobehavioral health](#), Stacey Scott, research associate in the Center for Healthy Aging, and Martin Sliwinski, professor of human development and family studies, people who experience disordered eating patterns may exhibit behaviors such as binge eating, loss of control over eating and food intake restriction.

The researchers, who present their findings today (March 15) at the American Psychosomatic Society conference in Miami, detected little change in the participants' moods prior to unhealthy eating. While negative [mood](#) was worse after disordered eating, a positive mood did not change either before or after any of the behaviors studied by the researchers.

The researchers gathered data from participants in real-life situations.

The team gave handheld computers to 131 women who had high levels of unhealthy eating habits and concerns about their [body shape](#) and weight, but did not have eating disorders. Several times during the day, the devices would prompt the participants to answer questions about their mood and eating behaviors.

"What we know about mood and eating behaviors comes primarily from studies with [eating disorder](#) patients or from laboratory studies," said Heron. "We were interested in studying women in their everyday lives to see whether mood changed before or after they engaged in unhealthy eating and weight control behaviors."

Smyth said that the study could lead to better treatments for women experiencing eating problems.

"This study is unique because it evaluates moods and eating behaviors as they occur in people's daily lives, which can provide a more accurate picture of the relationship between emotions and eating," Smyth said. "The results from this study can help us to better understand the role mood may play in the development and maintenance of unhealthy eating, and weight-control behaviors, which could be useful for creating more effective treatment programs for people with eating and weight concerns."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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