

NUTRITION HORIZON

New Study Shows You Can Have Your Candy and Eat it Too Without Adverse Health Effects

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Summary:Results of the study showed that while candy contributed modestly to caloric intake on days it was consumed, there was no association of total candy intake to increased weight/BMI -- suggesting that over time, consumers were able to balance longer-term caloric intake.

3/31/2011 --- Good news for candy and chocolate lovers, they tend to weigh less, have lower body mass indices (BMI) and waist circumferences, and have decreased levels of risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD) and metabolic syndrome, according to a new study published in Nutrition Research.

The findings are positive, but lead researcher Carol O'Neil, PhD, MPH, LDN, RD, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, cautions it is all things in moderation. "We certainly don't want these results positioned as eating candy helps you to lose weight," she said. "This study adds to the evidence base that supports candy's role as an occasional treat within a healthy lifestyle."

The study examined the association of candy consumption (broken into three categories: total candy, chocolate or sugar) on total energy intake (calories), nutrient intake, diet quality, weight status, CVD risk factors and metabolic syndrome in more than 15,000 U.S. adults 19 years of age and older based on 1999-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data.

Candy Consumers Successfully Navigate Calories In, Calories Out

Results of the study showed that while candy contributed modestly to caloric intake on days it was consumed, there was no association of total candy intake to increased weight/BMI -- suggesting that over time, consumers were able to balance longer-term caloric intake. This is an important finding, as the recently released 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) emphasize the concept that calorie balance over time is the key to weight management.

"The DGAs devote a whole chapter to helping consumers understand the key principles of weight management: know how many calories your body needs, learn the calorie content of foods and beverages, and recognize the correlation between the two," said Roger A. Clemens, DrPH, University of Southern California, and 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee member. "It's all about balance, moderation, variety in the diet and physical activity – and this study suggests some candy consumers may understand how to navigate the calorie equation."

Other findings include:

* Cardiovascular Risk Factors. Candy consumers were found to have a 14 percent decreased risk of elevated diastolic blood pressure and lower C-reactive protein (CRP) levels than non-candy consumers (CRP is a non-specific marker of general inflammation and one way to assess risk for cardiovascular, other chronic diseases as well as physical activity and stress.). For high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C), chocolate candy consumers had better values of this "good" cholesterol, specifically a 19 percent decreased risk of a lower HDL-C.

* Metabolic Syndrome. Chocolate candy consumption was associated with a 15 percent reduced risk of metabolic syndrome – a group of risk factors linked to overweight and obesity that can lead to increased risk for heart disease, diabetes, and stroke.

* Diet Quality. Measured by the Healthy Eating Index 2005 (HEI-2005), the study found that diet quality was not affected by total candy or chocolate candy consumption when consumed within energy limits. While sugar candy consumers did have a lower HEI than non-consumers, the difference between the two was quite small.

"Candy is a unique treat that can provide moments of joy and happiness. Consumers should feel confident that candy, consumed in moderation within a diet balanced with regular physical activity, can be part of a healthy, happy lifestyle," said Alison Bodor, senior vice president of public policy and advocacy, National Confectioners Association.