



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles H. Taylor, MD – March, 2007



### **Do shopping lists promote healthy choices? A new study has examined a quirky aspect of consumer behavior**

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The study, from the Journal of Consumer Research, suggests having to come up with options from memory led to more impulsive decisions.

Comparing memory-based and stimulus-based decision making, researchers from Duke, UCLA, and the University of Florida found that trying to recall what options are available - such as when making a shopping list at home - uses mental resources that might otherwise be used to counter impulsive choices.

It reveals an unexpected situation when consumers may opt for a dessert such as cheesecake over a healthy alternative such as fruit salad.

*"We find that consumers who must generate options from memory are more likely to select fun, hedonistic, and sinful options over sensible options or 'appropriate' options,"* wrote Yuval Rottenstreich (Duke University), Sanjay Sood (UCLA), and Lyle Brenner (University of Florida).

According to the researchers, when consumers decide what to purchase at the grocery store, the decision is 'stimulus-based,' that is, it is based on what is directly in front of us.

On the other hand, writing out a grocery list at home before going to the store to pick up the items requires 'memory-based' decisions. The consumer must attempt to recall the items available at the store before planning out meals for the rest of the week.

In three experimental studies, the researchers found that having to come up with options from memory led to more impulsive decisions.

Interestingly, consumers who had to recall what items were available also opted for lower-priced items, while consumers who had the options in front of them chose higher priced goods with the expectation that a higher price meant better quality.

*"The observed results are consistent with the notion that memory-based choices are guided relatively more by feeling-based considerations (say an urge for tasty food), whereas stimulus-based choices are guided relatively more by cognitive or deliberation-based considerations (say, the need to be on a diet),"* explained the authors.