

Food Addiction in Switzerland: link to emotion regulation and evaluation of a novel stimulus set to trigger craving

Projekt: 479

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Background:

From an evolutionary perspective, striving for nutrition is essential for survival. However, in some humans this urge transforms into pathological addiction to palatable foods. Addictive eating behaviour, as described in the concept of food addiction, occurs often in individuals with obesity or eating disorders. An improved understanding of food addiction could potentially complement existing treatment strategies for maladaptive eating behaviours by including the addictive aspect of the condition.

Aim:

This online study aimed at estimating the prevalence of food addiction in the Swiss population, at assessing the manifestation and the interaction with food craving, emotion regulation and emotional eating in individuals with food addiction. In addition, a newly developed set of food pictures to experimentally induce food craving was evaluated.

Methods:

$N = 414$ participants completed questionnaires regarding demographics and the *Yale Food Addiction Scale 2.0* (YFAS 2.0). Further, the survey assessed *craving*, emotion regulation and emotional eating by means of standardised questionnaires. Before and after the presentation of the food pictures – presented in two blocks for salty ($n = 101$) and sweet foods ($n = 101$), respectively – participants rated their craving on a visual analogue scale.

Results:

In $n = 61$ participants (17.9%) the concept of food addiction FA was met. Individuals with food addiction showed significantly higher craving, as a trait, than individuals without food addiction (control group). The group with food addiction was characterized with more dysfunctional emotion regulation and more frequent emotional eating when experiencing negative emotions. By contrast, the control group indicated more hedonistic eating than individuals with food addiction. The symptom count on YFAS 2.0 of individuals with food addiction was positively correlated with craving and emotional eating. Further, the presentation of the newly developed stimulus set successfully induced craving across all participants. The sweet as well as the salty stimuli could significantly increase current food craving in participants.

Discussion:

Also in Switzerland, there is suffering caused by food addiction, which is associated with high food craving, dysfunctional emotion regulation and maladaptive emotional eating. These findings illustrate and stress the need for new treatment options with additional emphasis on the addictive behaviours.