

 OBESITY

Training your brain can improve food choice

Regulation of craving (ROC) training — a mechanism-based intervention developed at Yale University, USA, by Hedy Kober and colleagues — improves food choices and reduces calorie intake, according to new research. In the present study, which included 1,528 participants, the authors found that individuals who had received ROC training were more likely than those who had not received the training to choose healthy foods over unhealthy foods

“In a prior meta-analysis we showed that craving for unhealthy foods is an important mechanism driving eating and weight gain,” explains Kober, the corresponding author. “We also found that we can teach people to use cognitive strategies, which involve thinking about the negative consequences of unhealthy foods, to reduce their craving for unhealthy foods.” With the aim of helping people to improve their eating and food choices, the team used the knowledge they gained during these prior studies to develop ROC training.

The ROC training was developed by combining methods from clinical psychology, experimental studies of emotion regulation

and behavioural economics. Kober and colleagues tested the efficacy of ROC training on multiple dependent variables, including self-reported craving, willingness to pay for food (in \$US), food choices and calorie consumption. “This multi-modal approach allowed us to develop a more robust intervention — drawing insights from different fields — and to validate it on a variety of relevant outcomes,” adds Kober.

The authors report that when faced with unhealthy food options, ROC training increased the participant’s chance of selecting a healthy food choice by 5.4–11.2% and participants who received training indicated that they were willing to pay up to \$1.50 more for healthy foods. “The results of our study show that knowledge alone is not enough and that training in the implementation of knowledge is necessary to help people change their food choices,” concludes Kober.

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