



Snacking motivations and behaviour in Australian adults: The role of personality traits

N. Kakoschke¹, S. Mercorella², P. Delfabbro² and E. Brindal¹

¹Human Health, Health & Biosecurity, CSIRO, Adelaide, 5000, Australia

²School of Psychology, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, 5000, Australia

Snacking, namely, consuming food and beverages in-between main meals, especially snacks with a high fat, salt and/or sugar content, is a major contributor to excessive energy intake and long-term weight gain⁽¹⁾. There are many potential drivers of snacking behaviours, including physiological (e.g., hunger) as well as social, psychological, and emotional reasons⁽²⁾. Individual differences, such as personality traits, have been linked to unhealthy snacking. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the potential explanatory pathways, such as motivations for snacking and habit strength, that may explain this relationship between personality and snacking. This cross-sectional study investigated the associations between personality traits, habit strength, motivations for snacking, and snacking behaviour, including choice and consumption. Participants were $n = 230$ Australian adults (female: $n = 164$; 71.3%) aged 18–77 years old ($M = 34$ years, $SD = 13.4$) who completed an online survey. The survey included assessments of personality traits (The Big Five Inventory 2), habit strength (the Self-Report Habit Index), motivations for snacking (The Eating Motivation Survey), momentary snack food choice (Snack Preference Task), and habitual snack food consumption (Snack Frequency Questionnaire). Overall, the most frequently selected motivations for snacking were 'liking', 'convenience', and 'habit'. Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between motivations for snacking and snacking behaviour. We found that health motivation for snacking was negatively correlated with momentary choice ($r = -.042$, $p < .01$) and habitual consumption ($r = -.033$, $p < .01$) of unhealthy snack foods and beverages. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to examine whether habit strength and the Big Five personality traits predicted both motivations for snacking and snacking behaviours after controlling for demographic variables. For health motivations for snacking, habit strength ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = .025$), openness ($\beta = 0.50$, $p = .003$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.58$, $p = .001$) were significant predictors. For momentary choice of unhealthy snacks, health motivation ($\beta = -4.35$, $p = .004$), pleasure ($\beta = 3.53$, $p = .029$), and visual appeal ($\beta = 5.29$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors. For habitual consumption of unhealthy snacks, health motivation ($\beta = -5.39$, $p = .001$), habit strength ($\beta = 2.89$, $p = .045$) and neuroticism ($\beta = 5.16$, $p = .045$) were significant predictors. These findings indicate that health motivation for snacking predicts both momentary snack preference and habitual snack food consumption. Moreover, personality traits may be linked with habitual unhealthy snacking behaviour via their association with specific motivations for snacking. Overall, these findings suggest that health promotion messages focusing on health motivation may be important for increasing healthier momentary and habitual snack choices to improve dietary intake and support weight management.

Keywords: snacking; dietary behaviour; habit strength; personality traits

Ethics Declaration

Yes

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References

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