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Article:

Comfort Food: A Yummy Weapon Against Loneliness

by [Wynne Parry](#), LiveScience Senior Writer

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Be it macaroni and cheese, chicken soup, kim chi or even the odd salad, comfort foods really do comfort us by fighting feelings of loneliness, new research shows.



We associate comfort foods with being in the presence of loved ones.

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"The idea is that throughout our lives, [comfort foods](#) are foods we eat time and time again in the presence of close others," said lead researcher Jordan Troisi, a doctoral candidate at the University of Buffalo. "Later in life, reminders of those foods or [eating](#) those foods again brings up that association and essentially serves as a reminder of those others with whom the foods were originally consumed."

A tasty experiment

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Troisi and his adviser Shira Gabriel began the two-part study by examining associations found with chicken noodle soup. After asking about 1,000 undergraduates about dishes they viewed as comfort foods, they decided to focus on the soup. They later fed chicken noodle soup (the canned variety) to a smaller group of participants, who then performed a word-completion task, filling in blanks after being given several letters. Those who ate chicken noodle soup and considered it a comfort food, were more likely to fill in the blanks to create relationship-oriented words (such as "include" or

"welcome"). This was evidence that the comfort food is associated with [relationships](#), according to the researchers.

For the second part of the study, the researchers assessed how participants viewed relationships, and then asked them to write about a fight they had had with someone close to them. The meal was imaginary this time; the participants then wrote about eating something they considered a comfort food or a new food. Participants also indicated how lonely they felt at the end of the study.

The results of this portion indicated that describing the comfort food made people who felt secure in their relationships feel markedly less [lonely](#) than others.

Food as a surrogate

The foods themselves are not responsible for the participants' feelings, Troisi told LiveScience.

"It's not so much that mashed potatoes or fried chicken produce these effects, it's more about these foods having developed an association with close others," he said. [[10 Good Foods Gone Bad](#)]

Incidentally, the study revealed a spread of comfort food among the Buffalo undergraduates, including not only American classics such as baked potatoes, cake and ice cream, but also Korean kim chi (spicy fermented, pickled cabbage), Chinese dumplings and even one salad, he said. He also noted that participants who did not consider chicken noodle soup a comfort food did not experience the same shift in mindset after eating it as those who did. And there was no notable difference in terms of type of food, [saltiness](#), sweetness, temperature or health value between the comfort and other foods the participants wrote about.

Because both experiments controlled for mood, it is unlikely the joy of thinking about or eating food influenced the results, he said.

The results will appear in an upcoming issue of the journal Psychological Science.

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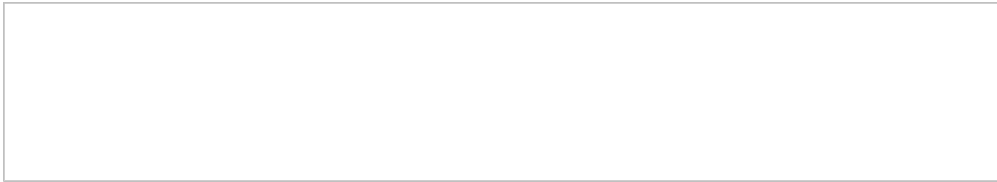


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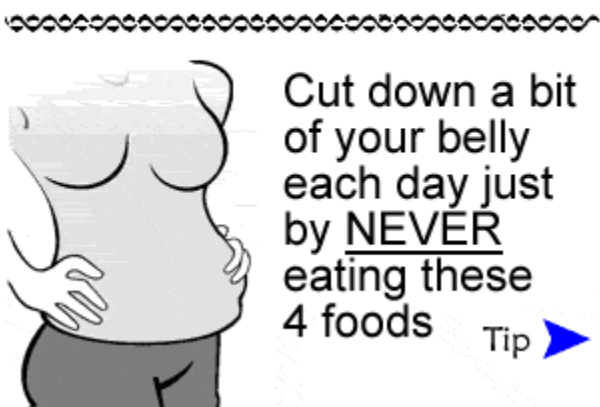


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