

# The effects of norm messages, social comparison tendency and body esteem on healthy and unhealthy food intake

**Introduction.** The effects of normative messages on food intake have been established in past research. Descriptive norms are more successful in influencing behavior than injunctive norms.

**Method.** This study examined whether these findings could be replicated in a laboratory setting, measuring actual food intake. We presented descriptive and injunctive norms, formulated negatively and positively. Also, body esteem (BE) and social comparison tendency (SCT) were examined as possible moderators.

**Results.** Results ( $N = 110$ , 78% female,  $M_{age} = 23.52$ ) indicated that SCT was a significant moderator: those with higher SCT were more susceptible to the influence of norm messages, resulting in less unhealthy food intake. No significant moderating effect was found for body esteem, nor were any significant moderating or main effects found for healthy food intake.

**Conclusion.** These results provide more insight in the use of social norms to promote healthy eating behavior: using social norms to decrease unhealthy food intake is more effective for people with high SCT.

**Keywords:** Norm messages, social norms, social comparison tendency, body esteem, food choice