Rituals Make Food Taste Better by Mark Dreher PhD

Nutrition scientist Mark Dreher, PhD, currently serves as the president of Nutrition Science Solutions, a nutrition and clinical science consulting firm at works with clients to solve nutritional challenges. Mark Dreher, PhD, takes a keen interest in every aspect of nutrition and lifestyle that contributes to better health.

Researchers recently discovered that performing seemingly irrelevant personal rituals prior to eating—such as blowing out the candles on a birthday cake or scraping chopsticks together before a meal—makes the [food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food%E2%80%8E) more enjoyable.

In an experiment testing this notion at Harvard University and the University of Minnesota, a group of 52 students were divided randomly into two groups. The first group was asked to break a chocolate bar still in its wrapper in half, unwrap one half and eat it, and then unwrap the other and eat that. The second group merely relaxed for a while and then ate the bar without an accompanying ritual. Members of the first group that performed the ritual rated both the flavor of the chocolate and their own pleasure higher than the group that just ate the chocolate did, and also said they would pay 25 cents more, on average, for the chocolate.

Psychologist Susan Albers of the Cleveland Clinic Family Health Center in Wooster, Ohio, believes that this has important implications for diet and nutrition. If pre-meal rituals enhance the taste and pleasure of the food consumed, these rituals may be used effectively to help people savor green vegetables and other healthy foods that they normally might not enjoy -- such as green vegetables and other health foods. Adding rituals also may help with mindful eating and portion control, as savoring food often helps people enjoy it more and eat less of it.