Food Quality and Preference 49 (2016) 66–69

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Food Quality and Preference

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/foodqual

Short Communication

Assessment of eating rate and food intake in spoon versus fork users in a laboratory setting

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 August 2015
Received in revised form 30 November 2015
Accepted 30 November 2015
Available online 2 December 2015

Keywords:
Cutlery use
Ad libitum food intake
Eating rate
Palatability
Energy density

ABSTRACT

Accumulating evidence show positive relationships between eating rate and body weight. Acute food intake is affected by eating rate, bite size, and palatability. The objective was to assess differences between participants who chose to use a spoon vs. fork in eating rate and food intake of four meals that differ in palatability (low vs. high salt) and in energy density (low vs. high fat). Forty-eight healthy adults (16 males, 18–54 y, BMI: 17.8–34.4 kg/m^2) were recruited. Participants attended four lunch time sessions after a standardised breakfast. Meals were either (1) low-fat/low-salt, (2) low-fat/high-salt, (3) high-fat/low-salt, or (4) high-fat/high-salt. Nineteen participants (6 males) consistently used a fork and 21 (8 males) used a spoon, 8 participants were inconsistent in cutlery use and excluded from analyses. Spoon users had on average a higher BMI than fork users ($p = 0.006$). Effects of cutlery use, BMI status (BMI < 25 vs. BMI > 25), salt, and fat, and their interactions were assessed in a General Linear Model. Spoon users consumed faster (fork: 53 ± 2.8 g/min; spoon: 62 ± 2.1 g/min, $p = 0.022$) and tended to consume more ($p = 0.09$), whereas the duration of the meals were similar (fork: 6.9 ± 0.3 min; spoon: 6:7 ± 0.2 min, $p = 0.55$). BMI status affected both eating rate and food intake ($p = 0.005$). There were no significant two-way or three-way interactions between salt, fat, and cutlery use on eating rate or food intake. In conclusion, participants who chose to consume with forks ate slower compared to spoon users.

1. Introduction

There is increasing evidence that faster eating rate promotes energy intake and weight gain (Leong, Madden, Gray, Waters, & Horwath, 2011; Llewellyn, van Jaarsveld, Boniface, Carnell, & Wardle, 2008; Ohkuma et al., 2015; Otsuka et al., 2006). Slower eating rate is associated with lower energy intake, regardless the type of manipulation used to change the eating rate (e.g., textural changes, instructions, and manner of consumption, see for review (Robinson et al., 2014)). Laboratory studies have shown that obese individuals consume with larger bites (or spoonful), consume at a higher eating rate, and this has been associated with greater food intake (Hill & McCutcheon, 1984; Laessle, Lehrke, & Duckers, 2007). Eating rate (Bobroff & Kissileff, 1986; Yeomans, 1996) and bite size (Bolhuis, Lakemond, de Wijk, Luning, & de Graaf, 2011) are positively related to palatability. Both bite size and eating rate are influenced by the individual manner of consumption (Hiiemae et al., 1996). Meals that mainly consists of rice, (small) pasta, lentils, or beans can be consumed with either forks or spoons. Some people prefer to eat this with spoons whereas others use forks.

In general, more food fits on a spoon than on a fork, it is therefore expected that a spoon increase the bite sizes and therefore the eating rate. The objective was to assess differences between fork vs. spoon users in eating rate and food intake in four meals that differ in palatability (by varying salt content) and in energy density (by varying fat content). We used a laboratory setting to measure eating rate and food intake of meals with variations in palatability and energy density in a controlled manner.

2. Methods

Forty-eight healthy participants (16 males, 18–54 y, BMI: 17.8–34.4 kg/m^2)enrolled in the study. Participants were recruited via posters at the Deakin University Campus in Burwood, Vic, Australia. Participants were informed about the procedure of the study and signed an informed consent before participation. This study was conducted according to the guidelines laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki and all procedures involving human subjects were approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee. This study was registered (ACTRN12615000048583) at the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR).

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2015.11.015
0950-3293/

Participants consumed ad libitum from a lunch that consisted of 750 cooked g elbow macaroni (Homebrand Coles, Vic, Australia) with 600 g tomato sauce that was either (1) low-salt/low-fat (LSLF), (2) high-salt/low-fat (HSLF), (3) low-salt/high-fat (LSHF), or (4) high-salt/high-fat (HSHF). The order of the four meals at lunch were randomized between subjects. The low-salt meals did not contain any added salt (<0.08% NaCl in sauce) and the salt concentration in the high-salt meals was 0.5% NaCl in sauce and was estimated to have optimal pleasant saltiness, based on earlier studies (Bolhuis, Lakemond, de Wijk, Luning, & de Graaf, 2010, 2012). The sauce of high-fat meals contained 30% canola oil (Home brand Coles, Vic, Australia) and 10% thickened cream (Home brand Coles, Vic, Australia), and was calculated to contain 15.5 g fat and 945 kJ per 100 g. The sauce of the low-fat meals did not have added fat and these contained 0.6 g fat and 412 kJ per 100 g.

In total, participants came on four different days, separated by one week, to the Centre of Advanced Sensory Science at Deakin University. Participants came to consume a standardised breakfast at either 8:30 am or 9:30 am, and an ad libitum lunch at either 12:30 pm or 1:30 pm, respectively. Participants were instructed to refrain from eating and drinking (except water) between breakfast and lunch.

Standardised breakfast consisted of plain mini croissants (Home brand Coles, Vic, Australia) and the amount was calculated to be 18% energy of the daily energy needs, estimated by the Schofield I equation (WHO, 1985), taking into account: gender, age, and weight. At the ad libitum lunch sessions, participants were served with macaroni with sauce and were instructed to eat until comfortably full. Participants were presented with a fork (6.0 × 2.2 cm) and spoon (6.0 × 3.9 cm) and free to choose which utensil to use, without further instructions. The researcher took note of the utensil use after consumption.

The ad libitum intake (g) was calculated as the difference in weight before and after food intake. The eating rate (g/min) was calculated by dividing the ad libitum intake (g) by the total eating duration (min). Participants were instructed to turn on a light as soon as they started eating and as soon as they had finished, the eating duration (s) was assessed by the researcher by using a stopwatch.

Participants rated hunger and fullness on a computer screen before ad libitum intake. After answering these questions, participants were served with the meal. They were instructed to take one bite and rate their perceived pleasantness on a computer screen. After this participants were instructed to eat until they felt comfortably full. After ad libitum intake, subjects rated again hunger and fullness. All questions were answered on a 100 mm visual analogue scale (VAS) labelled "not at all" (0) to "very much" (100) and data was collected using Compusense Five Software Version 5.2 (Compusense Inc., Ontario, Canada).

Statistical analyses were performed using SAS version 9.3 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA). Data are presented as LS means ± SEM, unless indicated otherwise. Differences in characteristics (age, BMI, restraint score) between spoon and fork users were assessed with independent *t*-tests. Because spoon users had on average a higher BMI, BMI status(<25 kg/m^2 vs. >25 kg/m^2), was put into the General Linear Model (GLM) that assessed effects of cutlery use on all outcome measurements. The fixed effects of cutlery use, BMI status, fat, salt, and their interactions on food intake, eating rate, pleasantness, and changes in appetite ratings (decrease hunger, increase fullness) were assessed in a GLM that included participant(nested within both cutlery use and BMI status). Tukey–Kramer adjustments were used for all post hoc comparisons. Pearson correlations coefficients were calculated for correlations between various outcome parameters.

3. Results

3.1. Participants characteristics

Twenty-one participants (8 males) consistently used a spoon and 19 participants (6 males) consistently used a fork (Table 1), 8 participants were inconsistent in use over the sessions (for example, using a fork in one session and using a spoon in the other three sessions) and were excluded from analyses. Spoon users had on average a higher BMI (Table 1). Twenty-four participants had a BMI < 25 kg/m^2; 9 used spoons and 15 used forks. Sixteen participants had a BMI > 25 kg/m^2; 12 used spoons and 4 used forks.

3.2. Ad libitum food intake, eating rate, and meal duration

Spoon users tend to consume more than fork users ($p = 0.09$, see Table 2), and consume significantly more when not adjusted for BMI status (unadjusted means: fork: 319 ± 13 g; spoon: 372 ± 13 g, $p = 0.004$). Spoon users consumed at a higher eating rate, both when adjusted ($p = 0.022$, Table 2) and not adjusted for BMI status ($p < 0.001$). BMI status greatly affected food intake (LS means BMI < 25: 319 ± 12 g vs. BMI > 25: 379 ± 17 g, $p = 0.005$) and eating rate (LS means BMI < 25: 52 ± 2.0 g/min vs. BMI > 25: 63 ± 2.9 g/min, $p = 0.005$). The total duration of the meal was not affected by cutlery use ($p = 0.55$, Table 2) and not by BMI status (0.23).

Food intake and eating rate were not affected by salt (intake: $p = 0.24$; eating rate: $p = 0.73$) or fat (intake: $p = 0.35$; eating rate $p = 0.78$). However fat did not affect food intake in grams, it greatly affect energy intake ($p < 0.001$). There were no interactions between all combinations of salt, fat, cutlery use, and BMI status (salt * fat, salt * cutlery use, fat * cutlery use, BMI status * cutlery use, BMI status * salt, BMI status * fat, and all three-way interactions)on either food intake (all *p*-values > 0.22) or on eating rate (all *p*-values > 0.16).

3.3. Appetite and pleasantness ratings

Pleasantness of the meals tend to be higher rated in the spoon users vs. the fork users (Table 2). There was neither a main effect of BMI status ($p = 0.70$), nor an interaction of BMI status * cutlery use on pleasantness ($p = 0.89$). Salt increased pleasantness ($p < 0.001$), but there was no interaction of cutlery use * salt on pleasantness ($p = 0.36$). There was no main effect of fat on pleasantness ($p = 0.85$), but there was a trend for an interaction of cutlery use * fat on pleasantness ($p = 0.06$, Table 2). There was no interaction of BMI status * fat on pleasantness ($p = 0.42$). In addition, no other significant two-way or three-way interactions between salt, fat, cutlery use, and BMI status on pleasantness were found (all *p*-values > 0.21).

There was no difference between spoon and fork users in hunger ratings ($p = 0.58$) and fullness ratings ($p = 0.45$) before ad libitum intake (data not shown). BMI status showed a main effect

Table 1
Mean ± SEM of BMI, age, and restraint score in fork and spoon users.

	Fork	Spoon	*p*
N (male/female)	19(6/13)	21(8/13)	
BMI (kg/m^2)	22.5 ± 0.4	25.8 ± 0.4	**0.006**
Age (y)	23.0 ± 0.8	26.9 ± 1.6	**0.044**
Dietary restraint[a]	6.7 ± 0.9	8.7 ± 0.8	0.10

Bold indicates significant difference.
[a] Dietary restraint score was measured according to factor 1 of the three factor eating questionnaire (Stunkard & Messick, 1985) (scale: min: 0–max: 20).