

A recent [study](#) shows that rats find oreos addictive — they like eating them just as much as they like cocaine. And they definitely preferred them to healthier foods like rice cakes.

People seem to have the same difficulty in resisting junk food as rats. What's to be done?



Junk Food Nation

A recent [paper](#) by RAND researchers suggests that relatively modest regulations could help.

The model they have in mind is based on alcohol regulation. The idea would not be to ban junk foods, but just to nudge people away from them — or rather, to undermine some of the mechanisms that draw people to eat things that aren't good for them. (And that generally aren't good for the environment, either.)

Based on that model, they suggest several different tools:

Prominent placement of food on store shelving, and at the end of aisles and floor displays, could be restricted to healthier foods. Restrictions could also cover which foods can be displayed at the cash register, where many impulse purchases occur.

Another alcohol restriction that might be applied to food includes prohibitions on restaurant or bar promotions such as “all you can drink” nights, which are banned in some countries to discourage binge drinking.

Restrictions on “all-you-can-eat” buffets should be considered, as buffets may encourage consumers to overeat. Buffets could be required to charge by weight of the food consumed to reduce the risk of overeating.

By the way, you may be wondering how similar the eating behavior of rats is to that of humans. A whole lot, as it turns out. According to another report:

While it may not be scientifically relevant, Honohan said it was surprising to watch the rats eat the famous cookie. “They would break it open and eat the middle first,” she said.