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Always getting lost? Blame junk food

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EATING too much fatty and sugary food not only swells midriffs and expands waistlines, but also has the reverse effect on cognitive ability and navigation skills, which appear to be diminished by eating unhealthily.



Following “world-first research” involving tests on students, scientists at the University of Sydney in Australia have found high-fat and high-sugar food to have a “detrimental effect on some aspects of cognitive function”, and on spatial awareness and navigation skills in particular.

“Young adults who frequently consumed foods high in fat and sugar were worse at remembering the location of a treasure chest in the virtual maze,” the researchers said in a paper published in The International Journal of Obesity.

The results highlight the “adverse effect” of snacking on “spatial learning and memory”, while confirming “the importance of making healthy dietary choices for cognitive health”, the team contended.

Previous research has found eating too much fats and sugars to not only be causes of diabetes, obesity and heart disease, but also to be “associated with faster rates of age-related cognitive decline in middle age and older adults”, as the team put it in their research paper.

And while the researchers have found that young people are not exempt from the illeffects of processed or junk food, the good news is that it is likely not the brain as a whole that is affected, but just the hippocampus – the part of the brain that helps manage spatial navigation and memory formation.

In other words, should you find yourself unable to remember your way home or turn left a la Zoolander after bingeing on jelly babies and deep-fried Mars bars, there is hope.

“Dietary changes can improve the health of the hippocampus, and therefore, our ability to navigate our environment, such as when we’re exploring a new city or learning a new route home,” said study lead author Dr Dominic Tran. – dpa