

Maternal Stress and Food Preferences:
A Lab Experiment with Low Income Mothers

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Abstract

We present evidence from a laboratory experiment on the effects of acute stress on food consumption among low-income mothers. We evaluate the effects of a stressful task on immediate and planned food consumption, and specifically on the nutritional content of the foods chosen. Immediate consumption is measured by in-laboratory consumption of a low calorie and high calorie snack; planned consumption is measured by incentivized food purchases in a specifically designed food choice tool. Measurements of participants' salivary cortisol and heart rate were taken over the course of the experimental sessions to assess the stressfulness of the stress task. Contrary to previous findings in the literature, we find no evidence of an effect of acute stress on the nutritional content of immediate or planned food choices.