

Why Delayed Gratification in the Marshmallow Test Doesn't Equal Success

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If you give a kid a marshmallow, she's going to ask for a graham cracker. And maybe some milk. Eventually, she'll want another marshmallow. (Or so the popular [children's book](#) goes.) But if you ask a kid to wait 15 minutes before eating that marshmallow, promising a second if she holds out, she's going to have a hard time complying.

This dilemma, commonly known as the [marshmallow test](#), has dominated research on children's willpower since 1990, when Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel and his colleagues published their [groundbreaking study](#) on the topic. Overall, they found that those who stop themselves from eating the first marshmallow in order to obtain the second ostensibly exhibit better self-control, a characteristic they linked with later academic and career success.

But according to a new study published in [Psychological Science](#), the marshmallow test is not as decisive as previous research suggests. Instead, results vary based on background factors including socioeconomic status, home environment, and early cognitive ability.