Why Healthy Eaters Fall for Fries

July 02, 2013

The New York Times:

LAST Tuesday, Connor Moran, a limit-the-red-meat, increase-the-greens, eat-salad-for-lunch kind of guy, stopped into a Bronx Dunkin' Donuts for his usual black coffee, no sugar, no cream.

He walked out with a sandwich of egg and bacon between two halves of a glazed doughnut.

Such is the puzzle of the food industry: American consumers, even otherwise healthy ones, keep choosing caloric indulgences rather than healthy foods at fast-food restaurants.

Public health officials have been pushing fast-food restaurants to offer more nutritious foods to help combat excess weight in the United States, where more than one-third of American adults are obese. And restaurants have obliged by adding healthy menu items. But it's the sugary, fatty items that are flying — or waddling — out the door.

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Gavan J. Fitzsimons, a professor who studies consumer psychology at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, has researched the disconnect.

In studies, he has presented participants with a range of menu choices — sometimes just unhealthy items, sometimes neutral items (like a fish sandwich) and sometimes healthy choices like salad. It turned out that including a healthy option did change people's behavior — by making them eat more unhealthily.

"When you put a healthy option up there on an otherwise unhealthy menu, not only do we not pick it, but its presence on the menu leads us to swing over and pick something that's worse for us than we normally would," Mr. Fitzsimons said.

Why? Mr. Fitzsimons called the phenomenon "vicarious goal fulfillment." By seeing a healthy menu option at a restaurant, "it basically satisfies that goal to be healthy," he said, and gives consumers leeway to order what they want.

Read the whole story: ***[The New York Times](#)***