

TALK

NEUROTICISM, NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL STATES, AND FOOD CHOICE MOTIVATIONS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM HUMAN ETHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Psychological factors such as depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) play a significant role in shaping eating behavior, reflecting both evolutionary adaptations and modern influences. A hypothesis for the preference for high-calorie foods (i.e., rich in fats and carbohydrates) suggests these were more sought after and consumed by ancestors during stressful situations. This preference for calorie-dense foods during periods of emotional distress may similarly manifest in individuals with higher propensities towards negative emotions, leading to unhealthy food choices. This study explores the correlation between neuroticism, negative emotional states, food behavior, and food choice motivations. For that, 449 Brazilian adults, predominantly women (85.3%), mean age of 35.4 years ($SD = 12.4$), completed a questionnaire with instruments to assess the Big-5 factors of personality, DAS, eating behavior, and food choice motivations. Results showed negative correlations between neuroticism, DAS, and fruit/vegetable consumption. Our findings align with the evolutionary perspective, suggesting that our eating behaviors are influenced by factors shaped throughout human evolution. However, they may lead to less healthy eating choices in contemporary environments, reflecting a mismatch between evolutionary demands and modern challenges. Also, negative relationships between neuroticism, DAS, and food motivations related to natural content and ethical concerns were observed. This suggests these emotional states are related to less ethical and health-driven food choices. This research emphasizes the importance of considering the evolutionary perspective when investigating the relationships between personality, emotions, and eating behavior. By better understanding these connections, we can develop effective interventions to encourage healthy eating habits and emotional health.