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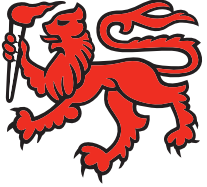
Comfort eating: An observational study of affect in the hours immediately before, and after, snacking

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Discretionary food intake

- “Snacks”
- Foods consumed outside of main meals
- Major contributor to excess energy-intake and weight-gain
 - 23-41% of our daily energy intake
- Key potential target for weight management interventions

**HUNGRY
JACK'S**

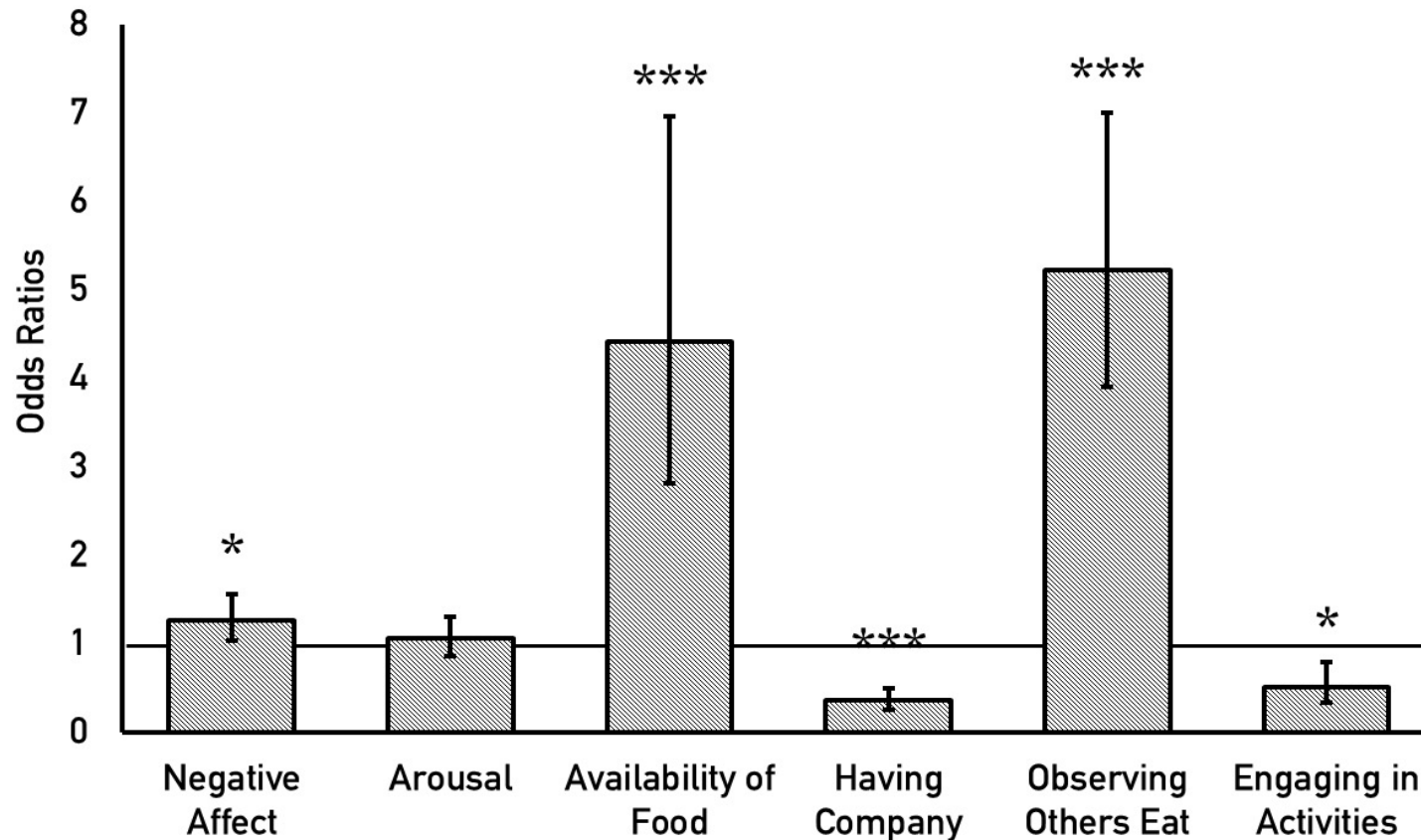
**Pizza
Hut**

DRIVE THRU



Drive Thru

Momentary cues influence discretionary food choices

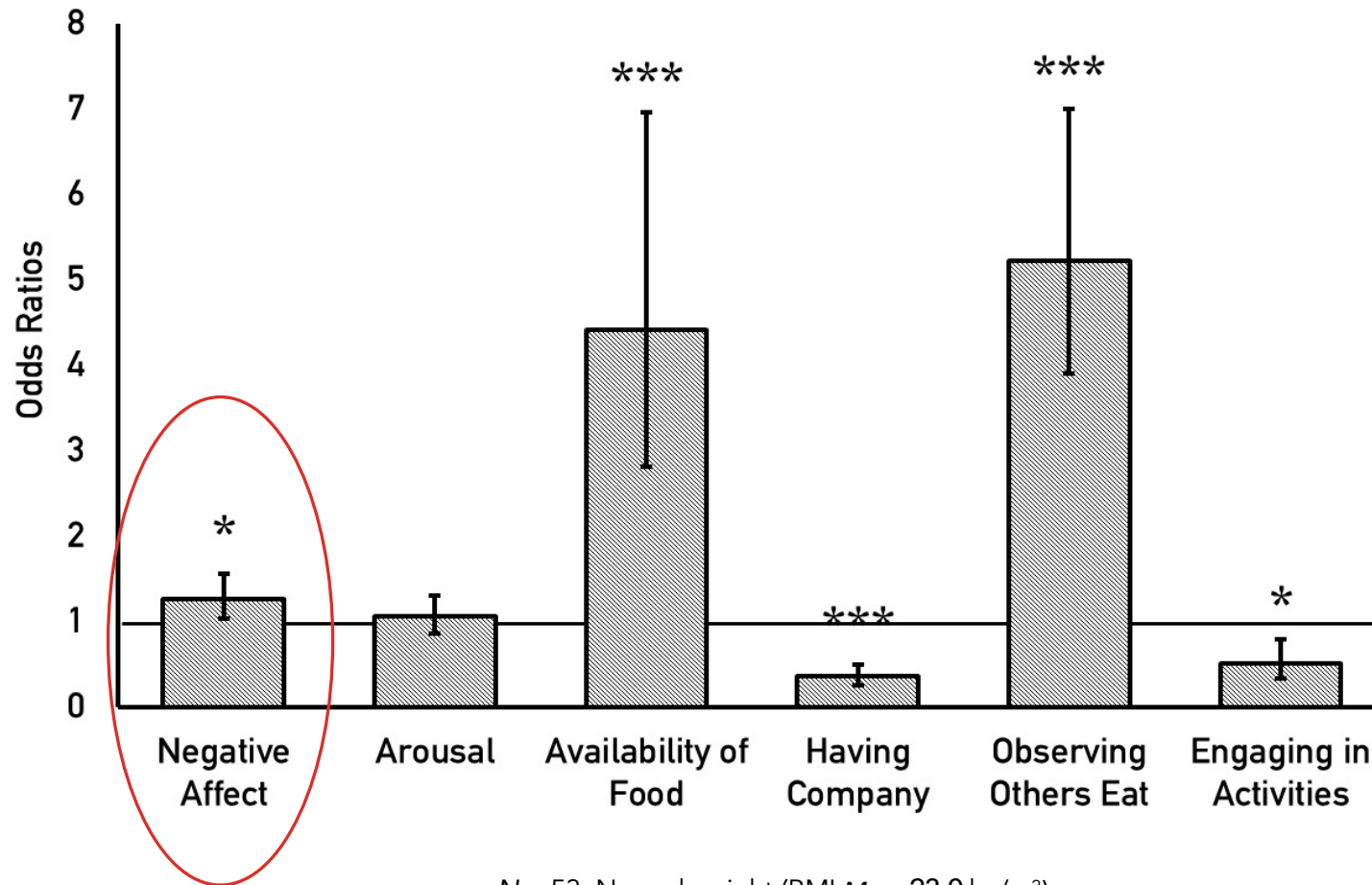


N = 53; Normal weight (BMI $M = 23.9$ kg/m²)

Schüz, B., Bower, J., & Ferguson, S. G. (2015). Stimulus control and affect in dietary behaviours. An intensive longitudinal study. *Appetite*, 87, 310-317.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.01.0020>

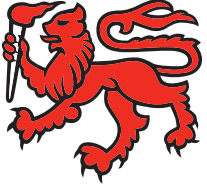
Negative affect is a predictor of discretionary eating



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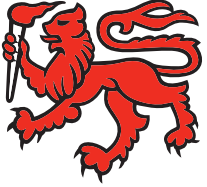
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Comfort Eating

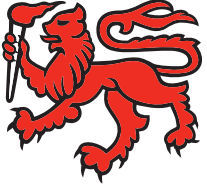
- Individuals drawn to energy-dense foods when experiencing negative mood
 - Belief that such foods will improve mood
- Studied in laboratory settings
 - Inducing affect & assess food intake
 - Mixed findings
 - Limitations, include time scale studied & ecological validity of methods



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Current Study

- Explore the notion of comfort eating under real-world conditions
- Key questions:
 - Does affect change in the hours leading up to snacking events?
 - What about after a snacking event?
 - Does the type of snack matter?

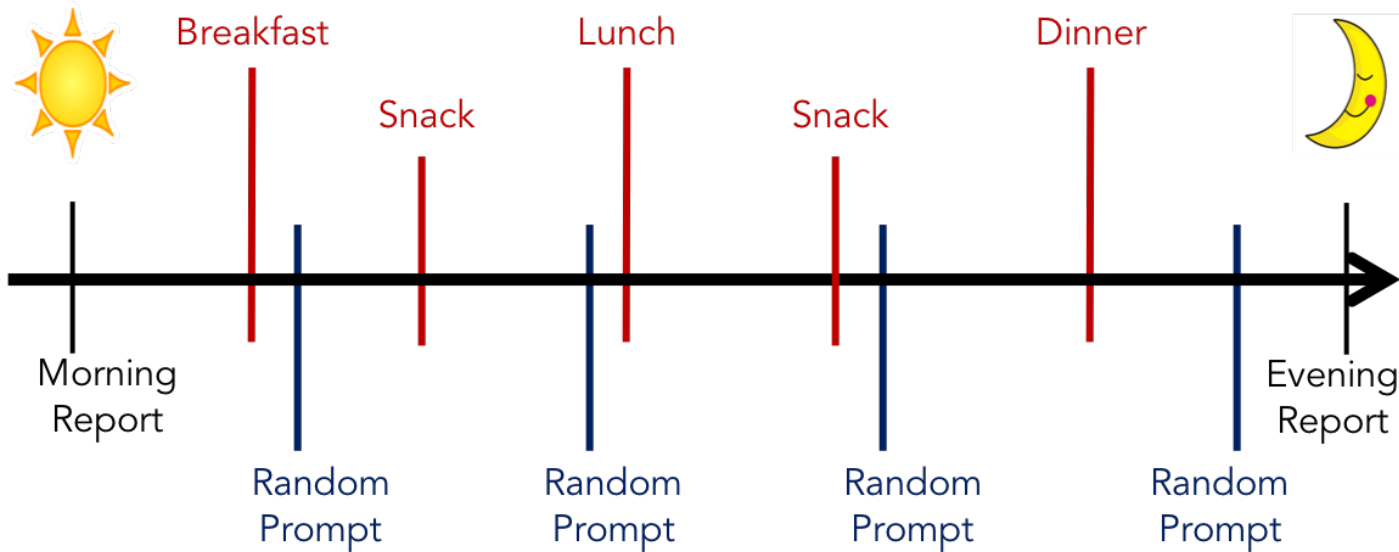


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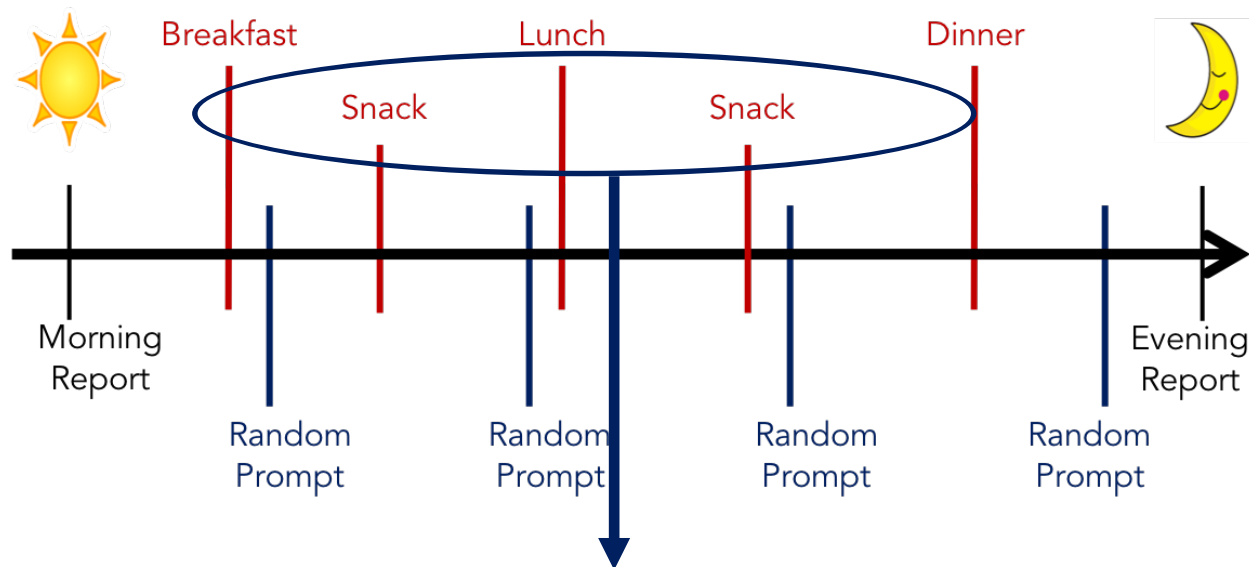
Current Study

- Pooled data from two observations studies:
 - 137 participants
 - Age = 32.3yrs, Female (67%), BMI = 27.9
 - Not current dieting & no history of eating disorder(s)
- Real-world monitoring of eating patterns for ~14 days

Real-time Assessment of Eating: Ecological Momentary Assessment



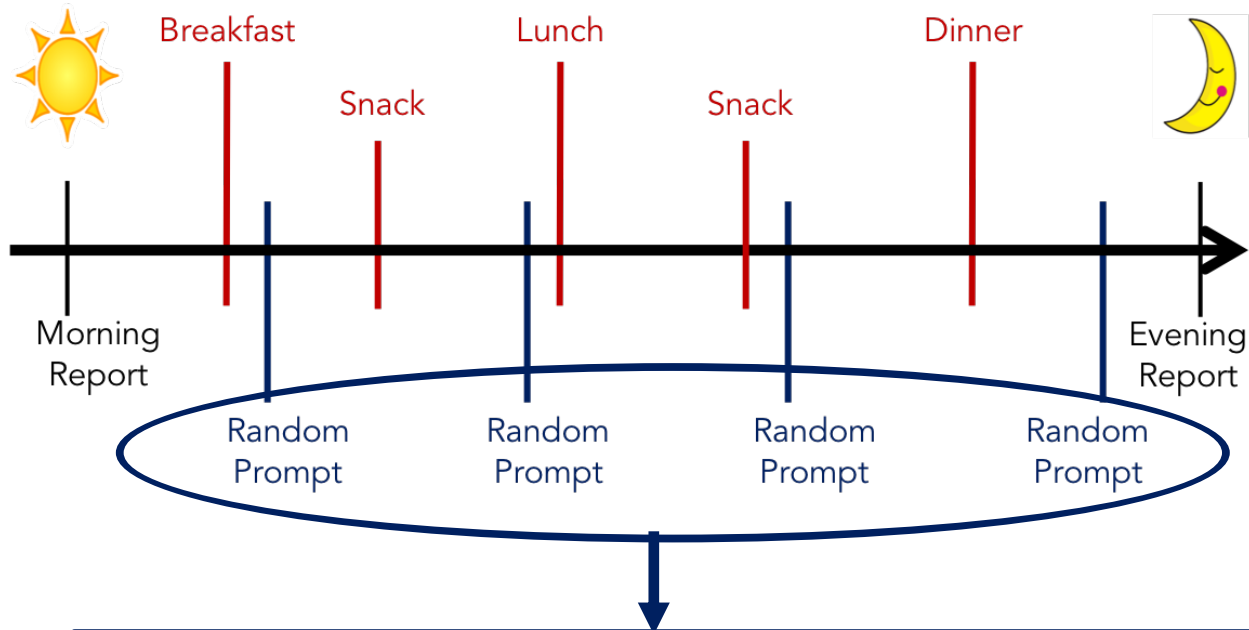
Assessment of Snacking Behaviour



- Self-reported snack type; later categorised as healthy / unhealthy
- Reported current mood



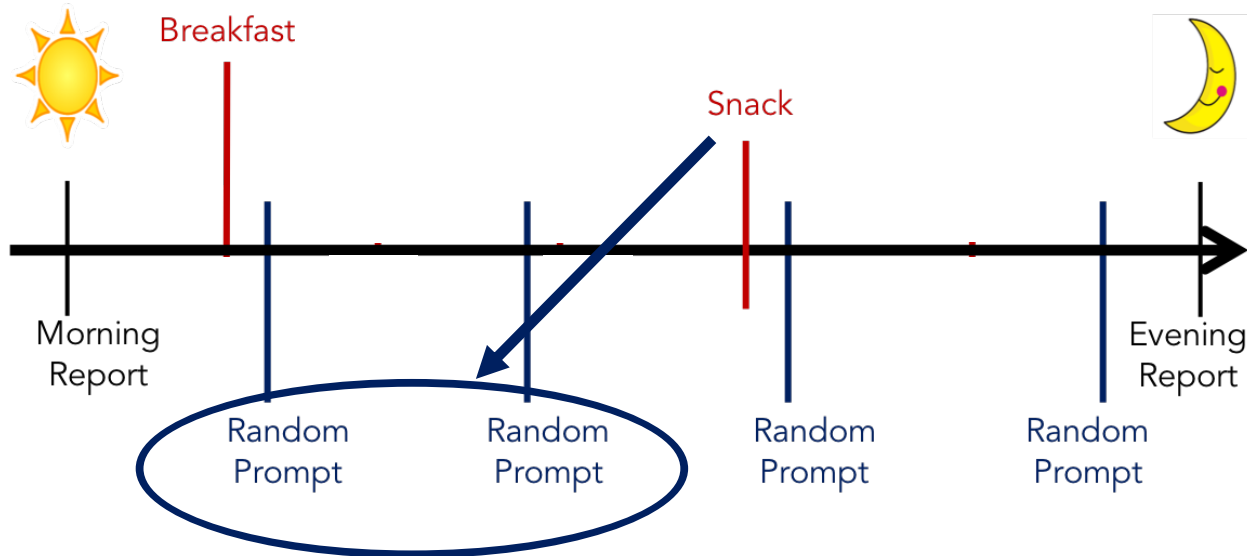
Random Prompts



- Randomly timed non-eating events
- Reported current mood

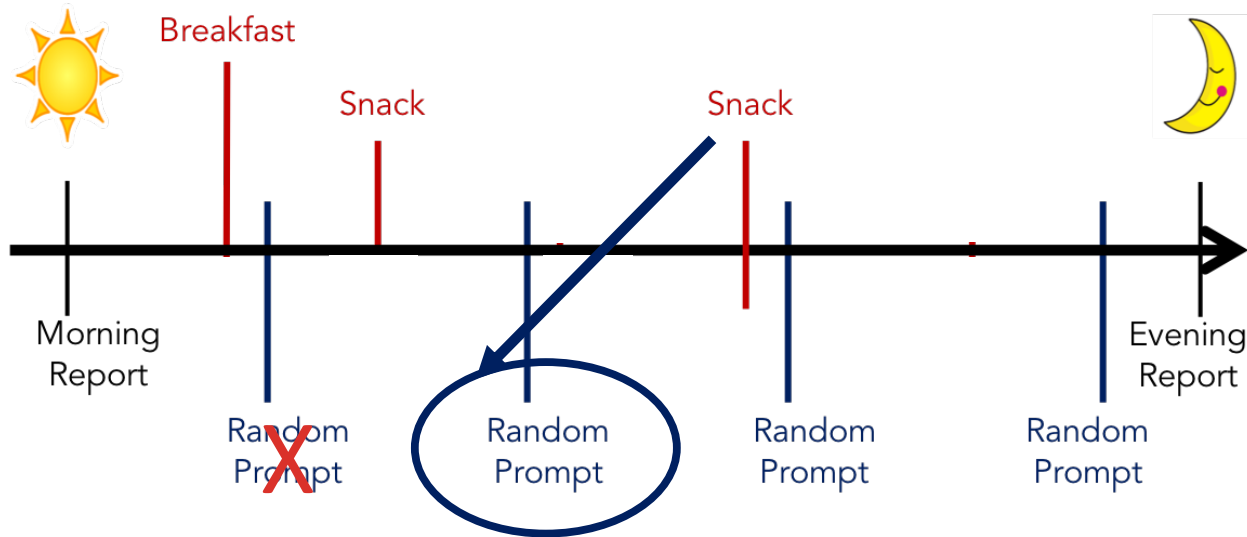


Selection of Assessments: Affect in the hours leading up to snacking events



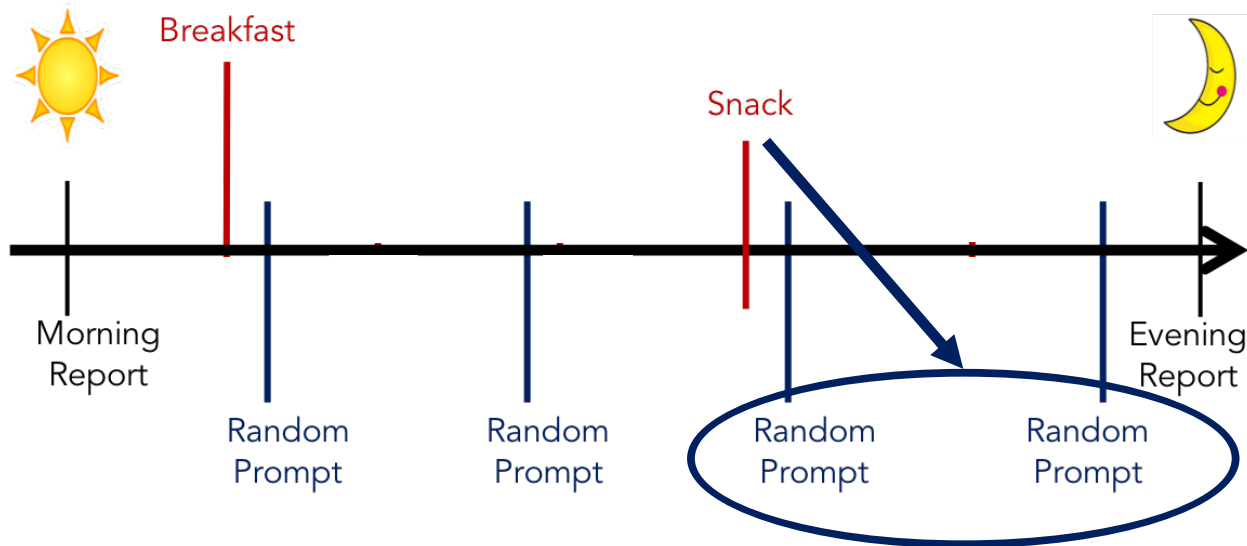
- Anchor at target snacking event
- Select random prompts that occurred in hours **leading up** to event

Selection of Assessments: Affect in the hours leading up to snacking events



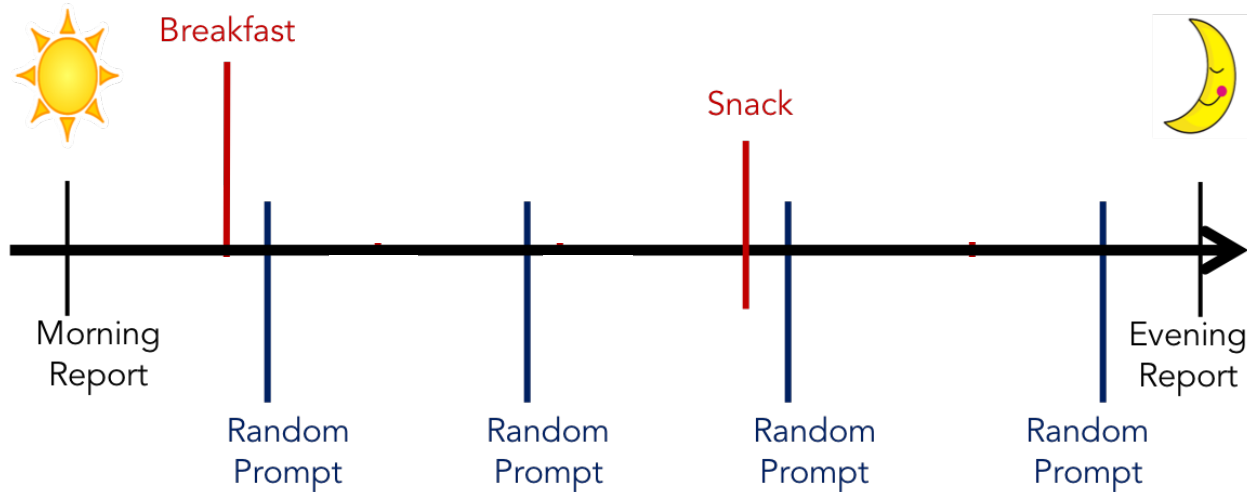
- Anchor at target snacking event
- Select random prompts that occurred in hours **leading up** to event
- Not interrupted by sleep or other eating / drinking events

Selection of Assessments: Affect following snacking events



- Anchor at target snacking event
- Select random prompts that occurred in hours **following** event
- Again, not interrupted by sleep or other eating / drinking events

Results: Assessments

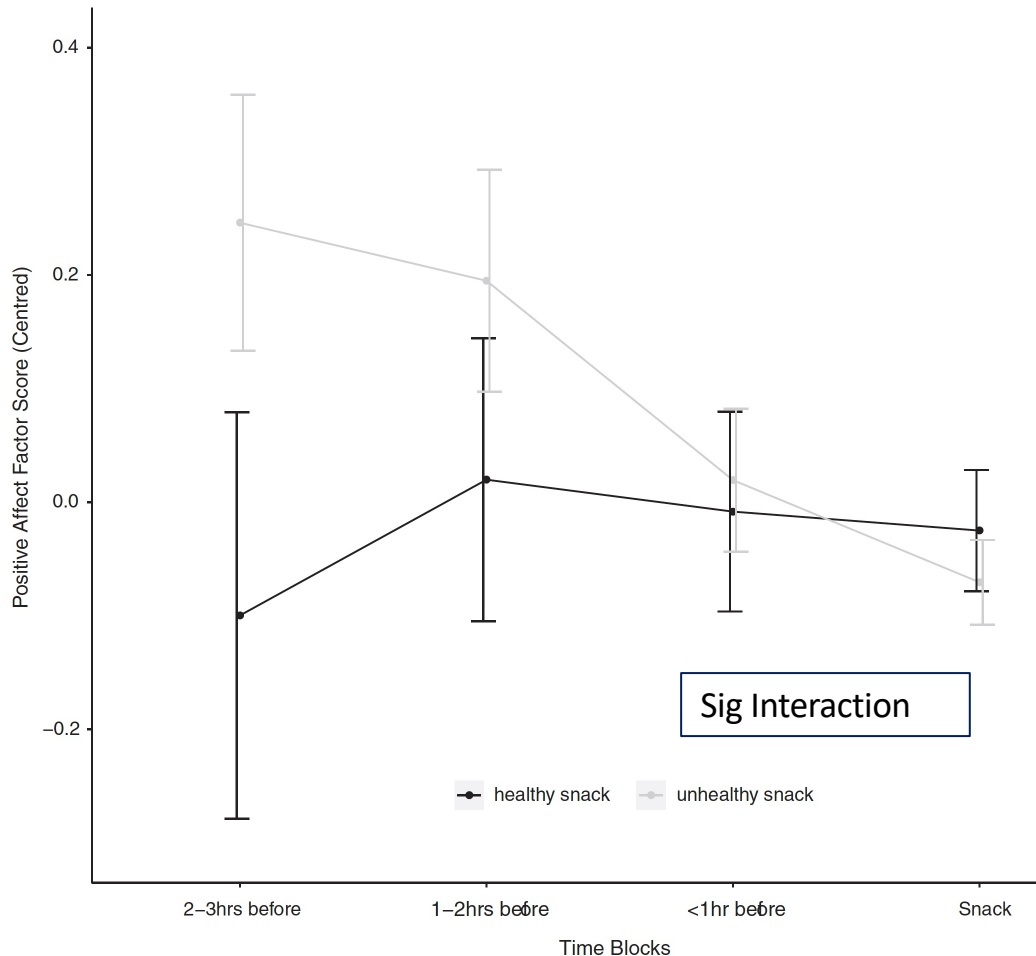


- 982 snacking events
 - 349 "healthy" and 633 "unhealthy"
- 1,011 random assessments



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Mood declined in hours leading up to unhealthy snacks ...

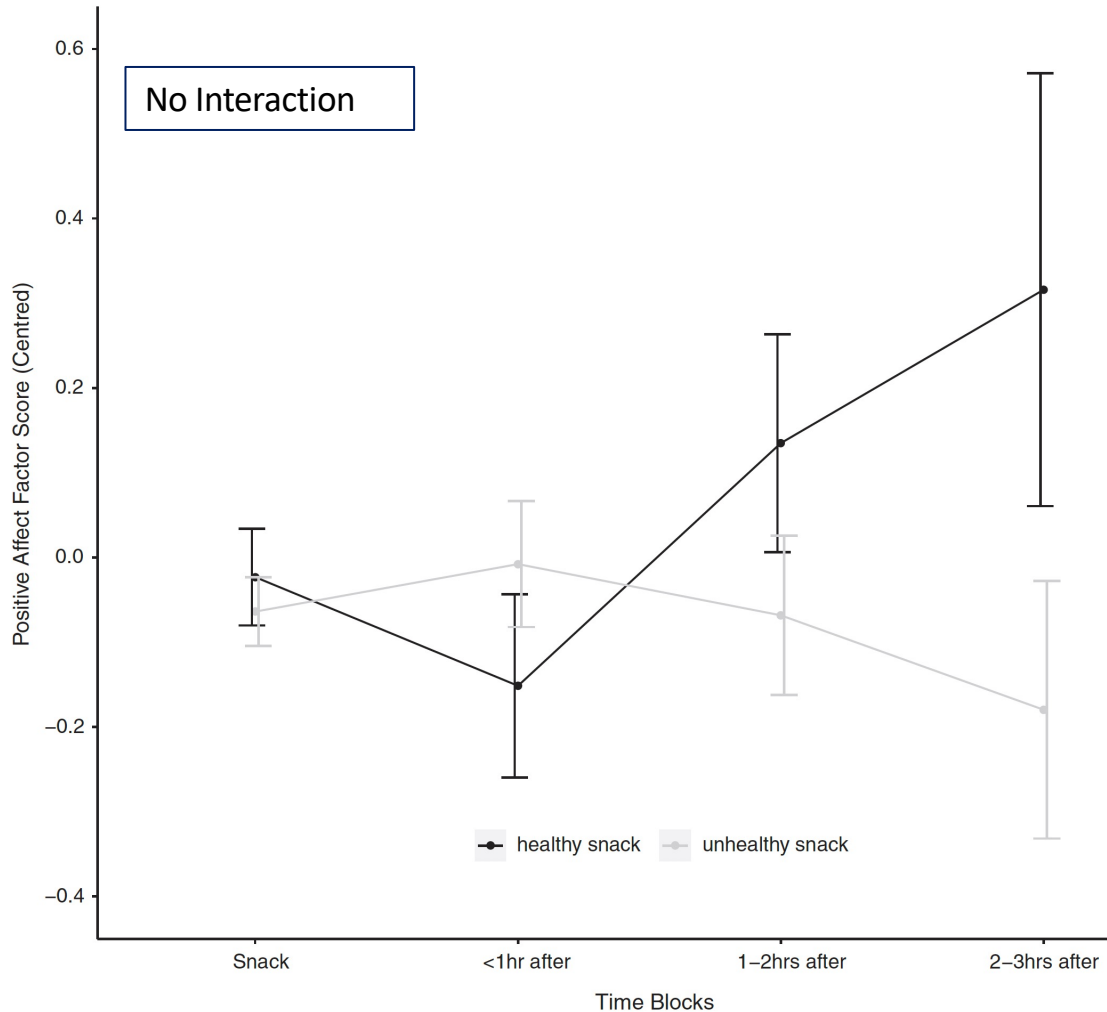


- **Healthy snacks:**
mood stable in hours leading up to event
- **Unhealthy snacks:**
positive affect declined

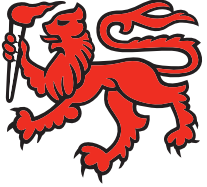


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But improved following healthy snacks



- **Healthy snacks:** mood dipped and then improved in hours following event
- **Unhealthy snacks:** Initially stable, then declined



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Discussion

- Findings consistent with the notion of comfort eating
 - Unhealthy snacks were preceded by worsening mood
- However, unhealthy snacks did not improve mood
 - Health messaging that challenges the perception that 'comfort' eating is beneficial
- Dietary interventions may be improved by including emotional regulation strategies



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Thank You




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