



Abstract

# The Impact of COVID-19 Hygienic Measures on Food Choice and Eating Behavior <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has led to several changes that have affected not only emotional and psychological well-being but also eating behavior. Herein, we sought to evaluate if depicting pandemic-related sanitary measures in a food consumption video would impact food appraisal, decreasing food attractiveness and the desire to eat. Participants performed, on two different days, an online protocol in which foods presented in a video, and following, in pictures, were evaluated regarding visual aspect, expected smell and taste, and desire to eat. The videos presented each day differed only regarding the presence/absence of sanitary elements adopted during the pandemic, composing COVID/non-COVID conditions. For both conditions, sweet and high-calorie foods were better evaluated when compared to salty and low-calorie foods, with the sweet food evaluation higher for the non-COVID condition when compared to the COVID-condition. Only for the non-COVID condition was the reported desire to eat higher immediately after the video, and for both conditions, it was higher at the end of the task when compared to the baseline. Correlation analysis suggests that depression and anxiety symptoms may reduce the smell appreciation of foods presented in the pandemic scenario. We conclude that food perception is affected by the presence of the sanitary measures adopted during the pandemic by reducing the desire to eat and food hedonic appreciation and, further, that depression and anxiety symptoms may be related to a higher negative impact of the pandemic on eating behavior.

**Keywords:** food behavior; multisensory food perception; priming; COVID-19



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**Informed Consent Statement:** All participants signed an informed consent previous to engaging the experimental protocol.

**Data Availability Statement:** All data are held in a public repository, available at OSF database (URL access: <https://osf.io/a258r/>).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interests.