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The Center For Consumer Freedom

Are We a Nation of Food Junkies?

[For some time](#), a [favorite claim](#) of the self-anointed “food police” has been that food companies are no different than drug dealers in getting Americans hooked on addictive substances. [Bloomberg](#) is the latest news agency to claim that “Fatty Foods [are] as Addictive as Cocaine in Studies.”

What’s at stake? Food makers could be the target of a drawn-out campaign akin to the anti-smoking crusade. Which is just what [hungry trial lawyers](#) are hoping will happen so that they can fatten their bank accounts, using food “addiction” as their key legal theory.

But this theory is bogus. Many of those studies (such as the Scripps Research study Bloomberg touts) are based on rat experiments, and rats are not people. [Patrick Basham and John Luik of the Cato Institute](#) examined one such study which features prominently in the Bloomberg story and found several methodological problems. Perhaps most important among them was this:

In humans, as opposed to rats, even the potent drug addictions to which food addiction is supposedly similar, according to Johnson and Kenny, do not compel behavior at all. Humans routinely stop being addicted to any number of things. And that makes all the difference.

Given proper medical advice and sufficient willpower and effort, a human [can give up a drug or destructive habit](#). (And, of course, it’s not like anybody’s holding up a convenience store for a box of Twinkies.)

[Time magazine](#) found another problem with the Scripps study: The rats were kept in solitary confinement. So an analogous study would be to keep people in solitary and see whether they preferred bread and water or a lot of snack food. We’re willing to wager it’s the latter. In the real world, though, there are multitudes of stimulations and choices that we face. *Time* also looked at a study that showed that rats held in isolation are far more likely to administer morphine than those in a well-stocked social environment and that those in the social environment would suffer withdrawal in order to use the toys provided. Perhaps [there’s more to obesity](#) than mere food intake?

The [American Council on Science and Health](#) may have got it right when, in analyzing the claim that neural reward pathways make eaters feel good, it affirmed, “Humans, like other animals, are motivated to eat, which would be expected since eating is essential for survival.” Of course, neither that simple fact nor rat studies will discourage [the circling vultures](#) from the trial bar. There’s [too much money to be made](#).