

Willpower Experiment: Test the Promise of Reward

Test the promise of reward with a temptation that you regularly indulge in because your brain tells you it will make you happy. Mindfully indulge, but don't rush through the experience. Notice what the promise of reward feels like; the anticipation, the hope, the excitement, the anxiety, the salivation – whatever is going on in your brain and body. Then give yourself permission to give in. How does the experience compare with the expectation? Does the promise of reward ever go away – or does it continue to drive you to eat more, spend more, or stay longer? When, if ever, do you become satisfied? Or do you simply reach the point of being unable to continue, because you're stuffed, exhausted, frustrated, out of time, or out of the "reward"?

People who try this exercise commonly have one of two results. Some people find that when they really pay attention to the experience of indulging, they need far less than they thought they would to feel satisfied. Others find that the experience is completely unsatisfying, revealing a huge gap between the promise of reward and the reality of their experience. Both observations can give you greater control over what has felt like an out-of-control behavior.

Adapted from: *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works and Why it Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More* by Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D.