

An individual's capacity to remain healthy in times of stress is exceedingly difficult, and there is sufficient support that stress can contribute to poorer eating habits such as 40% of chronically stressed adults will have an increased consumption of high-sugar and high-calorie foods. The impacts of stress and anxiety can be mitigated by engaging in healthy cognitive processes such as metacognition, which is the understanding of one's own thinking. However, there are few studies determining if metacognitive guidance can improve food choice in high stress individuals. The goal of the present study is to determine if metacognition can moderate stress and help participants navigate everyday health choices. At the University of Washington Tacoma, 43 participants were recruited to complete an online study. Food choice was measured by a pretest posttest design providing the participants with a forced-choice computerized simulation of various drinks i.e., sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) like soda and juice, or non-SSBs like water. Metacognitive guidance was given to participants in the form of knowledge-based information about SSBs and an opportunity for reflection on metacognitive monitoring, control, and evaluation. Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Intuitive Eating Scale-2, and a demographic questionnaire. We found metacognitive guidance through knowledge, monitoring, control, and evaluation does moderate the amount of sugar in the beverage choice task. Specifically, students opt for beverages with fewer sugar grams after the metacognitive guidance. Metacognitive guidance is a potential tool to guide patients to improve everyday health choices and potentially improve overall health outcomes.