

# Hershey's thinks you'll feel better about eating a thin Reese's Cup. You'll probably just eat (and buy) more.

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Reese's Thins will debut in March 2019. (Hershey's)

By [Rachel Siegel](#)

November 1

When Hershey's debuted a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup that will be 40 percent thinner than the original, the company said "consumers love Reese's in all shapes and sizes."

To at least one chocolate and peanut butter enthusiast, the decision felt more like "cruel and unusual punishment."

Hershey's confounded candy lovers this week when it announced that come March 2019, "Reese's Thins" will join its lineup. The slimmer peanut butter cup is geared toward those who "want something sweet with more permissibility," in the words of Michele Buck, Hershey's president.

"We're giving you what you want, for every part of your day, and you can have more than one," said Veronica Villasenor, senior director of the Reese's Brand. "You're welcome."

The Internet saw right through that.

"2019 was supposed to be better!!" vented one Twitter user.

"No one asked for this," bemoaned another.

"We all know we'll just stack those," said a third.

So maybe Hershey's has no shame -- but it's laser-focused on your sense of guilt.

Shoppers may ultimately give into a slimmer option that is marketed as a kind of reward -- and something to savor. In fact, researchers say that the very concept of an indulgence "with more permissibility" is a selling point for consumers looking to justify their eating habits, especially when it comes to goods they think they should avoid. The thinking rings true even if consumers end up paying more for smaller items, or if a treat's miniature packaging means people will ultimately eat more.

"The permissibility comes from the guilt that people feel and it creates a sort of rationalization -- it's thinner, or only 100 calories and so on," said Ravi Dhar, director of the Center for Customer Insights at the Yale School of Management. "People will eat two to three slices of pizza but insist on a Diet Coke. Psychologically, it makes people feel better."

Dhar said that simply shrinking the size of a food “gives you permission to pick it up.” Smaller-size cans of soda, 100 calorie packs of crackers and bite-size Halloween candy are all ways food companies have tapped into our collective weakness for foods we just can’t go without.

*[Grain bowls, cold brew and ‘hustle’: Nestlé has a plan to bring customers back to Big Food ]*

Wrapped up in this “permissibility” is an American instinct to give into temptation when it feels deserved, said Melissa Abbott, vice president for culinary insights at The Hartman Group, a consumer consultancy focusing on food and beverage culture. Consumers aren’t deterred when a smaller-size treat costs more than the full-size fare. The suggested retail price is \$3.99 for a bag of individually-wrapped Thins.

For example, it’s common for people to make regular afternoon trips to a coffee shop for an individually-packaged item, rather than keep an entire bag at their desk. barkTHINS and Brownie Brittle are both examples of slimmer, premium chocolate treats that have done especially well against legacy candy companies, Abbott said.

The ones who are most likely to shell out more money for less: those who have largely sworn themselves off the food group altogether.

For consumers, “there’s a little shame, a little guilt,” Abbott said. “There’s a lot more work marketers have to do to create products that are appealing to the modern consumer.”

Still, smaller portions come with basic health pay-offs. Dan Ariely, a professor of behavioral economics at Duke University, said that human nature is to finish entire portions of foods, even if we would be just as satisfied with half as much. Ariely mentioned one example of movie-goers being offered a large bucket of popcorn versus smaller buckets that together hold the same amount of popcorn. Shocker: No matter the container size, the salt and butter will keep people reaching for more until they hit the bottom.

*[California, home of the first soda tax, agrees to ban them]*

So if major food companies are able to subtly encourage people to eat less – even when it comes to junk food – Ariely says, by all means.

“It’s a little hard to eat half a Reese’s and then stop,” Ariely said. “So we’re making them smaller, and if you want more, go ahead.”

The ultimate question for companies like Hershey’s, Dhar said, is how to get customers over any initial guilt or hesitation. Maybe it’s with calorie counts displayed boldly on packaging, or ad campaigns promoting the need for a reward every once in awhile. Sometime’s it’s a simple ingredient change.

“My favorite is when they add some blueberries to anything,” Dhar said with a laugh.

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